

ALFRED
HITCHCOCK's
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

February, 1990

\$2.00 U.S./\$2.50 Can.

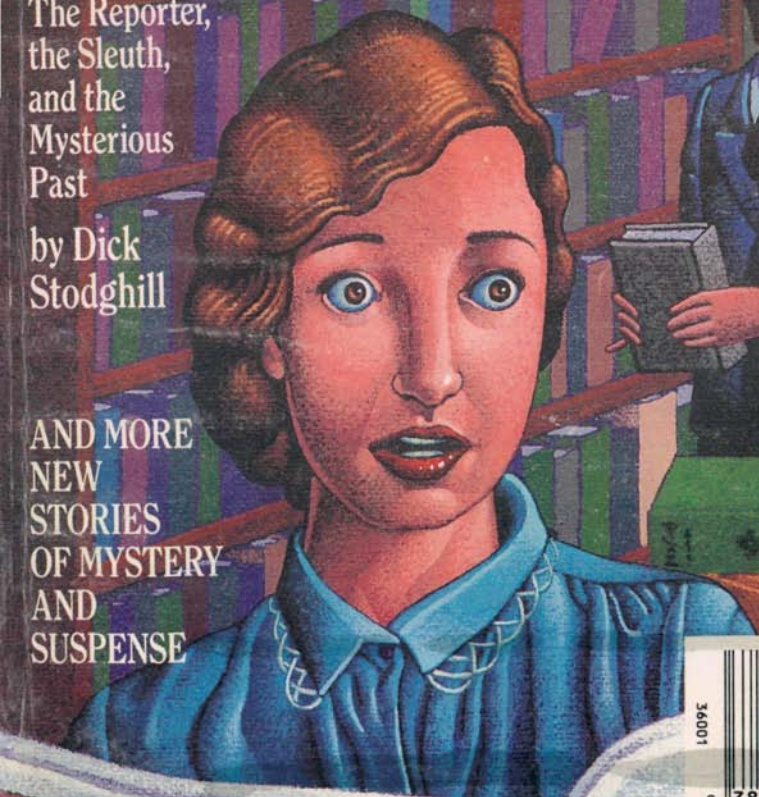


**PICTURES
IN A BOOK**

The Reporter,
the Sleuth,
and the
Mysterious
Past

by Dick
Stodghill

AND MORE
NEW
STORIES
OF MYSTERY
AND
SUSPENSE

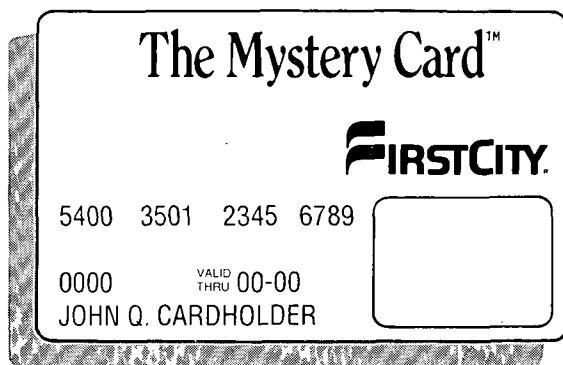


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Take the Mystery Out of Credit Cards

With the First Credit Card for Mystery Readers!



As a reader of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* you enjoy red herrings, twisted endings, and the surprises that make mystery reading such a pleasure. But no one likes to be surprised in areas of personal finance.

With all the confusion surrounding credit cards these days...interest rates, grace periods, and other details...we're pleased that First City is offering a MasterCard to our readers that will not require you to hire a private investigator, or an attorney, to help you decipher the benefits.

"The Mystery Card"

The unique gothic mansion design expresses your interest in finding clues and solving mysteries.

Your use of "The Mystery Card" will help

solve one of the major medical mysteries of our time...the cure for diabetes.

Every time you buy anything with "The Mystery Card," *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* will contribute a percentage of the price to the pioneering medical research of the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation.

Diabetes is a metabolic disorder that adversely affects the body's capacity to produce and use insulin, a hormone necessary for the conversion of food into energy. Approximately one out of every twenty Americans suffers from the disease. And, there is no cure.

Your use of "The Mystery Card" can help the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation discover the clue to the cure of diabetes!



Take the Mystery Out of Credit Cards

and put "The Mystery Card" in your pocket.

"The Mystery Card" is a MasterCard accepted by six million MasterCard merchants worldwide. There's no mystery about its value.

- There's no annual fee for one full year!
- A competitive variable interest rate of prime plus 7.7%.
- 25-day interest-free grace period on purchases when your balance is paid in

full each month.

- Instant Cash at ATMs and bank locations throughout the world.
- \$250,000 Travel Accident Insurance at no extra cost.

AND

- Exclusive discounts on mystery books and related merchandise.

First City MasterCard Terms and Conditions

Annual Percentage Rate for Purchases	17.7%
Variable Rate Information	Your Annual Percentage Rate may vary. The rate is determined by adding 7.7% to the Prime Rate listed in the "Money Section" of the first <i>Wall Street Journal</i> published after the 15th of the month preceding the first day of the billing cycle. As of 8/4/89 the rate as determined by this formula would be 18.7%. Under this offer, a maximum rate of 17.7% is guaranteed through 12/30/89.
Grace Period for Repayment of Balances for Purchases	You have 25 days after the statement date to repay your balance before a finance charge on purchases will be imposed.
Method of Computing the Balance for Purchases	Average Daily Balance (including new transactions) method.
Annual Fees	Membership fee: \$20.00 per year. Under this offer, the Annual Fee will be waived the first year. At the beginning of the second year, the Annual Fee will be billed to your account automatically.
Minimum Finance Charge	None
Transaction Fee For Purchases	None
Transaction Fee for Cash Advances: \$1.50 Late Payment Fee: \$15.00 Over-the-Credit-Limit Fee: \$15.00	
The disclosures above are accurate as of the date of printing on 8/4/89. These terms are subject to change after this date. Call First City Bank-Sioux Falls, N.A. at 1-800-641-7878 for any changes in the terms disclosed.	



First City Bank - Sioux Falls, N.A.

If you would like an application,

please call (800) 641-7878.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CONTENTS



SHORT STORIES

PICTURES IN A BOOK by Dick Stodghill	6
ASH by Charles Garvie	32
PAID IN FULL by W. W. Fredericks	36
THAT INTANGIBLE SOMETHING by Geoffrey Hitchcock	58
BLANDERSON'S BLUE BLAZES by Jas. R. Petrin	74
CLAIMING TERRITORY by Morris Smith	96
HIT AND RUN by Robert Lopresti	105
PLAYING DOLLS by Taylor McCafferty	114

MYSTERY CLASSIC

THE MAGIC CASKET by R. Austin Freeman	126
--	------------

DEPARTMENTS

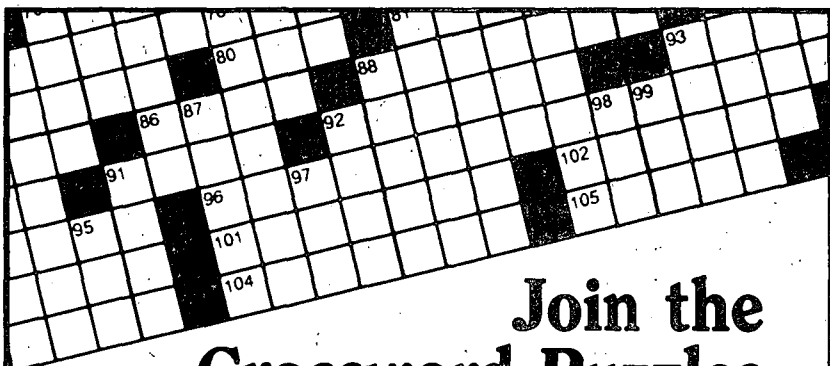
EDITOR'S NOTES	4
THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH	73
UNSOLVED by Lassiter Wren and Randle McKay	95
BOOKED & PRINTED by Carol Harper	148
SOLUTION TO THE JANUARY "UNSOLVED"	151
MURDER BY DIRECTION by William Heller	152
THE STORY THAT WON	155

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 35, No. 2, February, 1990. Published every 28 days with two issues combined at year end, by Davis Publications, Inc., \$2.00 per copy in the U.S.A. \$2.50 in Canada. Annual subscription 14 issues for \$27.97 in the U.S.A. and possessions; \$31.50 elsewhere payable in advance in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 7055, Red Oak, Iowa 51591. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing office. Canadian 3rd class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. © 1990 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. The stories in this magazine are all fictitious, and any resemblance between the characters in them and actual persons is completely coincidental. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Printed in U.S.A. All submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 7055, Red Oak, Iowa 51591. In Canada return to 1801 South Cameron, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3E1.

ISSN: 0002-5224.

Cover by Ray-Mel Cornelius

COVER BY RAY-MEL CORNELIUS
 LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
 ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Join the Crossword Puzzles of the Month Club and put your crossword skills to the test!

Become a member and receive five intriguing, fun and challenging new puzzles — mailed right to your home every month! These are not reprints, but *original, full-size* puzzles edited especially for our members by the noted crossword puzzle expert Henry Hook. Month after month, you'll receive five brand-new puzzles and their solutions . . . five fiendishly clever puzzles with the same degree of difficulty as those in the Sunday New York Times!

Join today! A perfect gift!

An entire year's membership is just \$29.95. (We pay the postage.) Send your check or money order to:

Crossword Puzzles of the Month Club

629 Green Bay Road, Dept. 181
Wilmette, Illinois 60091

Or call toll-free: 1-800-433-4386
and charge it to your MasterCard or Visa.

Your satisfaction is guaranteed.

©1989, CPMC

EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

Some of you may remember that in our September, 1989, issue, in this space, appeared a Guest Editorial by our (now sometime) book reviewer Mary Cannon regarding the First Annual Malice Domestic Convention. That convention had taken place the preceding April, and Ms. Cannon, who attended, was more than enthusiastic about it.

The second annual convention is now upon us, Malice Domestic II. Mystery fans are invited. As before, it will take place in Washington, D.C.; the dates are April 6-8, 1990. Since last year's convention was sold out, and since the number of attendees is limited again this year (last year, we believe, membership was limited to about three hundred persons),

anyone who is interested probably hasn't a moment to spare in signing up.

A membership costs \$75, and no memberships will be sold after March 20. For further information, write to:

Malice Domestic
P. O. Box 701

Herndon, Va. 22070-0701

The Guest of Honor this year will be Patricia Moyes; the Fan Guest of Honor is Phyllis Brown; the Toastmaster is Sharyn McCrumb.

We assume that, like last year, the Ghost of Honor will be Agatha Christie.

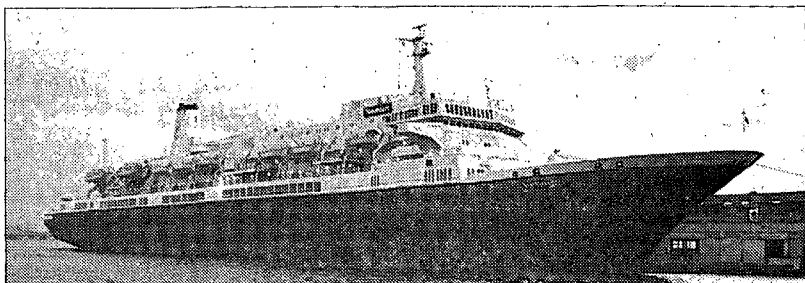
Also coming up . . . the First Annual Midwestern Mystery & Suspense Convention, to be held in Omaha, Nebraska, during the Memorial Day week-

(continued on page 113)

Cathleen Jordan, Editor; **Holly Wallinger**, Managing Editor; **Judy Downer**, Editorial Assistant; **Terri Czekzo**, Art Director; **Ron Kuliner**, Associate Art Director; **Nancy Siwinski**, Junior Designer; **Carole Dixon**, Production Director; **Cynthia Manson**, Director of Marketing and Subsidiary Rights; **Florence Eichin**, Manager, Contracts and Permissions; **Elizabeth Beatty**, Subscription Manager; **Brian McKeon**, Circulation Planning Director; **Christian Dorbandt**, Newsstand Marketing and Promotion Manager; **Dennis Jones**, Newsstand Operations Manager; **Veena Raghavan**, Public Relations Promotions Manager; **Irene Bozoki**, Classified Advertising Director; **A. Bruce Chatterton**, Advertising Director; **Lisa Feerick**, Advertising Services Manager.

(New York: 212-557-9100; Chicago: 312-346-0712; Los Angeles: 213-795-3114.)

Joel Davis, President and Publisher; **Joe DeFalco**, Vice President, Finance; **Carl Barte**, Vice President, Manufacturing.



**Don't Miss Out on the Second Annual
Davis Mystery Magazines' Mystery
Cruise '90 February 10 to 17, 1990
Aboard Holland America Cruise Line's
Fabulous Luxury Liner M.S. Noordam**

There's no mystery about the best way to experience seven sun-and-fun-filled days in the Caribbean. Enjoy the wonderful ports of San Juan, Puerto Rico; Tortola, British Virgin Islands; St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands; and Nassau, the Bahamas, all while sailing aboard one of the finest cruise ships afloat.

The best way to enjoy a mystery is to be a part of one! There will be crimes to solve, trivia contests, movie classics, great prizes, gifts, parties, and surprises galore.

We are pleased to announce that our two Edgar Award winning authors will be Ed Hoch and Bill Crenshaw. You will have an opportunity to meet both of these special guests and hear them speak about the "art of writing mysteries."

Book Early. Space Is Limited.

Prices for the mystery cruise include round-trip air fare and start at only
\$1279.00

per person, *double occupancy from most major cities.* There is limited availability in some accommodation categories. First come, first served.

To be part of this fabulous week and to receive all the special amenities, you must book your cruise through:

OMNI GROUP CRUISES, INC.

6513 Hollywood Boulevard, Hollywood, CA 90028

Write or call for more information (800) 876-OMNI

Please send me more information about Mystery Cruise '90

Name _____

(Please print)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone () _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FICTION

— Pictures — — in a Book — by Dick Stodghill



Illustration by Ray-Mel Cornelius

6
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She wasn't Hollywood pretty. She didn't have that poured-from-the-same-mold look that made one starlet indistinguishable from another. On the coast she wouldn't have turned many heads, but we were in Akron and my tastes were different, more plebeian, so I was attracted.

Her mouth was probably a little too wide. I liked that; it was the reason it turned up at both ends, pixie-like, before she smiled. A casting director might have found her eyes too big, and if that wasn't enough, he would have washed her out because of the upward tilt of her nose. And she was too short, I suppose, and she looked as though she ate regularly. Not to say she was plump, just solid, and everything was there in just the right proportions.

She was spending what remained of her lunch hour in a musty used book shop on Howard Street, a place where the old and new flourished side by side. Up front, ahead of the ceiling-high shelves of forgettable books by forgotten authors and the occasional gem hidden among them, ahead of the tall stacks of *National Geographic* and the smaller ones of *Dime Detective* and *Flying Aces* that I had come to rummage through, were two tables of books in

pretty decent shape, most of them oversized and filled with photos. Books to display on a coffee table, not sit back and read. For a quarter or fifty cents you could take Paris or the Canadian Rockies or the rain forests of South America home with you, no small accomplishment in that Great Depression summer of 1937. It was one way, a cheap way, of escaping the heat of Akron and forgetting the smell of the rubber factories for a few hours.

I lingered a while. Not because of any great interest in the books on the tables, but to watch the girl as she turned the pages of a pictorial history of the good old days, the Roaring Twenties. She'd smile or sometimes frown, then laugh aloud, but quietly, over a scene that in a mere ten years had gone from fashionable to incongruous. It was the clothing and trappings of women her own age that she found amusing. Flimsy short skirts, stockings rolled down and twisted in a knot just above the knees, hats that clung to the scalp like bathing caps, long cigarette holders held at a jaunty angle, all were gone now, just a wistful memory.

Her own dress of pale blue with a white collar edged in lace fell a modest inch or two below her knees. Her brown

hair wasn't hidden by one of those tight-fitting hats designed by a woman-hater. No cigarette holder or even a cigarette, and I could only speculate as to what held up her stockings.

She glanced at the clock on the wall, saw it was time to go back to wherever it was she spent her working hours, but went ahead and turned one more page. After starting to close the cover she let it fall open again, then gave a sudden little cry and placed one finger over her mouth. I stretched to see what it was that had shocked her and saw a picture of five men in black suits and derby hats, grim-faced characters with the look of predators masquerading as undertakers. The four in the background were fifty or older, well-fed portly men you would not ask to hold your watch or wallet.

The one in front was much younger yet even more sinister. Thirty-five, I guessed, but it was as impossible to imagine his ever having been younger as it was to picture him smiling. His face was thin and so were his lips. Dark brows highlighted eyes so pale that the iris was all but undetectable; the one visible ear seemed to be missing its lobe. In themselves none of his features was evil, yet together they personified everything that was

When the girl raised her brown eyes, even larger now than before, and darted them about as if seeking someone she knew, I said, "Anything wrong?"

She had known someone was nearby without actually having been aware of my presence, wrapped up as she was in her own thoughts. For several seconds she stood staring at me, curious and uncertain, not frightened but cautiously wary. Then the ends of her mouth turned up and she shook her head.

I glanced down again at the picture in the book, then back to her. "See someone you know?"

"No." She gave a tentative shake of her head as if she weren't quite convinced. "No, but the one man looks like my boss. Younger, though." She closed the book, checking the clock again. "If I don't get back to work, I may not have a boss after today."

She smiled as she turned to go. I watched appreciatively as she hurried to the door. When she was gone I started back to check the stacks of pulps, then found my mood for browsing had vanished with her. It didn't take long to reach the door, yet by the time I was on the street the girl was nowhere in sight. Why hadn't I said more? Asked her name, at least. Introduced myself or something. Other men would have. It just wasn't my

style, which was why I spent so many Saturday nights alone. Bram Geary, king of the lonely hearts. I would have died before admitting it to anyone, of course.

It was three days later, mid-afternoon on a Thursday and past the final *Times-Press* deadline, when the report came in that a body had been found in the river. I was idling around the police station in City Hall a block up the steep Center Street hill from Main. In theory a reporter on the police beat kept regular hours; in practice he was on call day and night. Going home to Mrs. Bauer's boarding house on Dudley Street too early could mean missing something important. My one great dread in life was being scooped by Tom Kennedy, my counterpart on the rival *Beacon Journal*.

I drove to the scene myself rather than bumming a ride with a detective. Doing so could have left me stranded with supertime approaching, a meal already paid for at the boarding house. I parked my five-year-old Chevy along with the police cars on an abandoned inter-urban right of way leading to a bridge no longer in service. The humidity had climbed out of sight; everything in the distance was milky gray.

Directly ahead was the lone section of the Cuyahoga River

that was both wide and deep. To the right below the hill lay the Ohio Edison power plant, but I followed the others down an incline to the left, across the road and on to the wooded area called The Gorge. On the opposite bank it was a park that followed the river for miles, a greenbelt of hiking trails, rocky ledges, and precipitous dropoffs in the heart of a busy metropolitan district.

The body had been discovered at the foot of a trail dam by boys out for an afternoon of fun, three raggedy urchins of twelve or so with baggy knickers and expressions that oscillated between fright and excitement. Someone who apparently didn't know the area had weighted down the body and dropped it in the deep part of the river, unaware of the swift current when Ohio Edison allowed water to go rushing over the dam. At other times there was only a trickle of water and below the dam a few shallow pools contained by slabs of flat rock.

The body lay face down in one of the pools, half in, half out of the water. A brown-haired woman in a blue dress with a white collar trimmed in lace. I turned away, suddenly light-headed. Plato Largis, the detective in charge, nudged another and snickered. "When we turn her over," he said, "the guy'll

faint." He likely was right, but I didn't look. Not for a while, and by then I had steeled myself.

It wasn't her. It wasn't the girl from the book shop. The dress was a cheap one from a department store rack, probably chosen with great care but duplicated a hundred times in Akron alone. I sighed with relief as if that other girl had been an old friend. My pleasure was short-lived; as I looked down at the unfamiliar face my stomach turned queasy.

She had been shot. Once in the back of the head, gangland execution style, then wrapped in a tire chain running through the openings in a cement block. Her right hand still clutched the strap of a purse that itself was missing.

It didn't add up. Largis didn't say so within earshot, but I knew he was thinking the same thing. Had it been a man, no one would have been surprised. One of the Cleveland gangs, that would have been the first thought. The Murray Hill Mob or the Glenwood Gang, not any of the boys from Akron because they would have known better than to have dumped a body at that point of the river in the mistaken belief that it would remain hidden.

But a young woman in a summer dress, the gangs didn't op-

erate that way. A fake, that was the second thought. An attempt to throw the police off the track by making it look like something it wasn't. The work of an amateur if that were true, someone who didn't know how hard it is to fool city detectives. The wonderfully unique and clever ways to commit murder, they've seen them all before.

Plato Largis was angry. You could see it in his eyes when he looked up from where he was kneeling beside her, and in the set of his jaw. He had a daughter the same age, twenty or twenty-one. A dark-haired girl who probably owned a blue dress.

I must have looked shaky because he rose quickly to his feet and laid a hand on my shoulder just as I turned away and covered my mouth. The nausea past, I faced him again.

"Why don't you go home, kid," he said. "I'll fill you in in the morning."

I didn't argue. In a few weeks I would turn twenty-four, not a kid by any means, yet still vulnerable in certain situations.

Several days passed before the victim was identified. Mary Eagleson, a clerk at Federman's, a low-priced Main Street department store patronized by families at the low end of the economic scale. In 1937 it was

always busy. The girl's boyfriend, lacking an alibi and having a chain for only a single tire in the trunk of his car, was arrested for first degree murder. Weeks went by and it faded from mind.

Jack Eddy was quiet at supper. Attempts by others around Mrs. Bauer's long table to draw him into conversation resulted in only terse replies. It wasn't like the normally cocky, self-assured assistant manager of Wellington's National Detective Agency's branch in Akron. When Kitty Bauer, daughter of the household and his steady date, suggested taking a ride to cool off, he just shook his head. She flounced off to the living room in a huff. A moment later I followed along when Jack went out on the front porch.

The evening air was heavy and you could smell rain. In actuality it was rubber from Goodyear Plant One a block away that you could smell. There was a special pungency to it that every Akronite knew meant rain was approaching. After a few silent minutes I said, "What's eating you, Jack?"

He turned to me with a wry grin. "Got a tough one, buddy. Nothing to work with. Can't get it off my mind."

I had suspected as much. Jack

was a driven man, a man obsessed by a desire to get ahead. He enjoyed difficult cases, but one that looked like it might go unsolved made him edgy. It wouldn't look good on his record.

"What's it about?" I asked.

"The family of a guy in jail for murder hired the agency. Farm people from over near Delphos in the western part of the state. A good kid, they swear. Wouldn't hurt a fly. He seems okay so maybe they're right, but I can't get to first base."

"This murder, was it out there or in Akron?"

"Here in town. He's supposed to have killed his girl."

"The one found in the river last month?" When he nodded I said, "I was out there when they found the body. At first I thought it was a girl I talked to a few days earlier."

He perked up a little. "I remember now. That was the day you came home green around the gills. What made you think it was this other girl?"

"Their dresses were identical. Both had brown hair, but when they turned her over, she didn't look anything like the girl I saw downtown."

He stroked his chin with one finger, then sat erect. "This girl, would you recognize her if you saw her again?"

"Sure. She was kind of cute."

He jumped up. "Come on, buddy, we're taking a ride."

I tagged after him as I always did. Doing so had led me to some good stories, but there was more to it than that. Jack Eddy was a forceful man. At six three I was four inches taller, yet his personality dominated my own and at times it seemed our relationship was that of slave and master.

As I followed him to the steps, Kitty Bauer stood glowering at me from the other side of the screen door. I shrugged and said, "Just obeying orders."

Before Jack had started his big Auburn sedan, Artie Bauer came charging around the corner of the house, shirttail flying behind. A week earlier we had celebrated his twelfth birthday at the supper table. Everyone came through with an inexpensive gift and his parents had given him his first wristwatch. Now he cried, "Bram, where yuh goin'? You promised to help me with my Derby car."

"I didn't, Artie. I said I'd look at it, that's all. The rules say a boy has to build a Soap Box Derby car himself, you know that."

"Dammit, Bram, everybody else gets help."

Jack Eddy laughed. "Your mom hears you swearing like that, buster, and you'll need all

the help you can get."

Artie was tough, a quality needed for survival on the east-side streets, but tears were welling up in his eyes. I sighed and said, "Tomorrow, Artie, I promise."

"Oh sure, big deal. Just like you promised today."

"No, I mean it. Tomorrow for sure."

Jack drove east on Market Street past the Goodyear complex of factories and offices, then a few minutes later the General Tire plant, equally odoriferous on a hot August evening. The rain, if it came, would be welcome. "How do you get yourself in these messes?" said Jack. "The race is Saturday, you know. If you're going to help the kid you'd better be quick about it."

He stopped at a two story brick apartment house on Massillon Road, the street leading to the airport. I stood watching as he sweet-talked the owner out of a key to one unit, marveling again at the way women took to him. In my opinion Jack had as much charm as a coiled rattler. But the lady handed him the key so I followed him upstairs. "What's this all about?" I said. "Who lives here?"

"The dead girl used to. Went half-and-half on the rent with a roommate."

When he had unlocked the

door and we were inside the apartment it was apparent that it hadn't been aired out for a while. Jack went straight to a framed picture on a table and handed it to me. "Anyone you know?"

I blinked, shaking my head in surprise. "Hold on a minute, Jack. Something's wrong here. This isn't the dead girl, it's the one I saw in the bookstore downtown."

"Good for you, buddy. That's what I was hoping you'd say. Now all we have to do is find her."

"Find her? What's the story, Jack?"

"The girl you talked to was Sue Baney, the roommate. Trouble is, buddy, she disappeared the day before Mary Eagleson's body was found."

"I didn't hear anything about that. Are you saying she may have been murdered, too?"

"Not likely. She took a suitcase of clothes and toilet articles with her."

"You're not saying you think she's the killer?"

"Only if she had help." He opened the door to the hallway. "Let's get a beer. I want you to tell me everything that happened the day you saw her."

Jack drank straight from a brown bottle of Burkhart's at the Lenox Cafe across from a Goodyear's Willard Street

Gatehouse. It was a hangout for rubberworkers, a place for a shot and a beer before work, another of the same afterward. In the background "Chapel in the Moonlight" was playing on the nickelodeon. Hardly appropriate in the surroundings, and yet the Lenox was also a place to behave yourself.

I told Jack what little there was to tell. When I had finished he said, "So all you really talked about were pictures in a book? And she seemed to know a man in one of them?"

"She said it looked like her boss. These were hard characters, Jack. Prosperous men, but from the underworld unless I miss my guess. Not street mugs, big shots."

He banged the bottle down on the bar. "You know, buddy, this may be the break I've been looking for. First thing in the morning we've got to find that picture."

"I'm working in the morning, Jack. You'll have to do it yourself."

He ran me down at City Hall a little before ten. "The bookstore's ready to open," he said. "Come on, we can walk there in five minutes."

"Jack, I'm work—"

"Trust me, friend. This'll be a story that'll knock 'em dead. I can feel it."

He was leading me along by the arm as he talked. I said, "Oh, sure," but was recalling the times when his hunches had paid off. I jerked my arm free and used a pay phone to call Ben Goldsmith, the *Times-Press* city editor. I told him I might be onto something good and would be out of touch for half an hour. He wanted details, of course, but I stalled him. "It won't be for today, but if it pans out it'll be hot stuff." I didn't emphasize the *if*, but knew I should have.

The book was gone. "It had a green cover," I told the proprietor.

"Oh," he said, waving an arm at the shelves holding thousands of books. "With that to go on, finding it shouldn't be any trouble at all."

"Look, it was on one of the tables up front here and it was all pictures from the 1920's."

"This has to be your lucky day. I *do* remember it. *The Twenties Roar Again*. A man came in and bought both copies just before closing time a few weeks ago."

"There were two and he bought them both?" said Jack. "What did this guy look like?"

"We only get a hundred people in here every day, so of course I remember every one of them. But oddly enough, I do recall him. It isn't every day

that somebody buys two copies of the same book, you know. And anyway, this was an unusual person. Eyes like a leopard, strange ears."

"No lobes?" I said, and he nodded.

"But you don't know who he was?" said Jack, and the man shook his head. "Then where can we find one of these books?"

"Can't help you there. You might try the library."

Jack went to the library, I went back to City Hall.

I was in the basement with Artie and his crude, unfinished Derby car that evening when Jack came down the stairs two at a time with a green book under one arm and a grin on his face. "Here it is, buddy," he said. "Had to go to Cleveland to get it. I was on the phone to bookstores all over northeast Ohio before I ran down a copy."

He had marked the page, having recognized the photo from my description. I read the cutlines under it, then looked at Jack and said, "Oh, swell. No idsents."

"Hey, Bram," Artie whined, "you promised—"

"Pipe down, kid," said Jack, and then to me, "Don't you recognize him? It's Arnie Renna, one of Capone's top boys. A handy man with a submachine gun. Some say he was one of the

triggermen on the Saint Valentine's Day Massacre.

"This picture," he went on, "was taken the day of Dion O'Banion's funeral back in '24."

"Dion who?"

Jack gave me a look that said I should know. "It was the early days of Prohibition and the bootleggers were doing big business, really raking in the dough. O'Banion had the north side of Chicago, Capone the south. Then O'Banion started muscling in on Capone's territory and got rubbed out. One of the biggest funerals they ever had in Chi, and more flowers than anybody ever saw in one place before. O'Banion was nuts about flowers. Had his own florist shop for a cover, and that's where they got him, buddy. Renna may have been in on it. It was Capone's work, not much doubt about that, but even so he sent a mountain of flowers and some of his boys showed up for the funeral."

"How do you know all this, Jack? And what makes you think this Arnie Renna would be living in Akron today if he was such a big shot?"

"Knowing it's my job. Should be yours too, covering the police beat like you do. If Renna's here it's because he's been on the lam for three years. Escaped prison at Joliet and had to take on a new identity, but that

doesn't mean he doesn't still have connections."

"None of this is clear to me."

"Look, figuring it out is a cinch. The girl sees the picture and goes back and tells Renna about it, not knowing who he is and thinking it's a big joke. So Renna calls some friends in Chicago, they come down and take care of her. Then he goes and picks up the books. And you can bet he checked to be sure there weren't any more copies in town."

"But the friends screwed up," said Jack. "They get the wrong girl, maybe because she's borrowed that blue dress for the evening. Then, being out of towners, they screwed up again and dump the body in a place they think it'll never be found."

"What movie you guys talkin' about?" said Artie. "That one at the Rialto with Pat O'Brien and Humphrey Bogart?"

"Get to work on that crate of yours, pal," Jack told him. Then to me again, "Problem is, her landlady doesn't know where Sue Baney worked or anything else about her, not even if she's an Akron girl or came from out of town. None of the neighbors knew her and she isn't in the city directory."

"You said she disappeared the day *before* her roommate's body was found. What do you make of that?"

"I figure something happened to tip her off. She was scared. She took off without telling anybody, even Mary."

"How can you know she didn't tell the Eagleson girl?"

"If she had known someone was gunning for Sue Baney, would Mary have gone out wearing one of her dresses?"

"Maybe they cooked up a plan to fool Renna."

Jack planted a playful punch on my arm. "Buddy, you've been seeing too many of Artie's kind of movies."

"So when do I get this big story?" Ben Goldsmith's eyes were fixed on me, his city-editor scowl every bit as menacing as he intended it to be. I told him what I knew, and he wasn't pleased. "Pure speculation, right?" He lit a cigarette, then leaned far back in his chair while fingering his left ear the way he did when he was thinking about doing something he probably shouldn't.

He moved suddenly so that he was bolt upright again. "But what the hell, we can run a speculative piece on a gangster if we want to. 'Capone Killer in Akron?', how about that for a head?" He nodded. "Put it together for the late editions."

It was a terrible idea. I felt

as if someone had handed me a rifle and told me to go over the top into a hail of machine gun bullets. "I don't know, chief," I said. "They wouldn't like it down at headquarters, and if Renna really is here and takes off, then Jack Eddy would be—"

"Who are you working for, Geary?" Goldsmith roared. "If it's the police department or some detective agency, okay, but if you're still on the *Times-Press* payroll, just write the damn story like I said."

I spent an hour skimming clips on Chicago gang wars of the twenties in the newspaper's morgue. Some people had started calling it the library a few years earlier when the *Times-Press* moved to its fancy new building at High and Exchange streets on the south end of downtown Akron. Around the city room it was still known as the morgue. Arnie Renna's name popped up here and there so when I felt I had enough I went back to my desk and wrote the story. Goldsmith had used the right word, it was pure speculation. Was a woman murdered because a Capone henchman was hiding out in Akron? Had another disappeared for the same reason? Was an innocent man in jail? All guesswork, no meat, no answers. But our readers would devour it.

There was no room for speculation on one matter: would I be the fairhaired boy at police headquarters after the story appeared? And Jack Eddy, in the future would he let me in on what was happening? As I handed the story to a copy boy and watched him toss it on the city desk, my stomach felt like I had swallowed a bar of lead. Goldsmith used his blue pencil a few times but sent the story to the composing room without comment.

Laughter rang out as a story from the Scripps-Howard wire passed from desk to desk. I listened but wasn't in the frame of mind for funny stories. In a place called Sneedville, Tennessee, a child bride of nine had been spanked by her schoolteacher for being naughty. Her twenty-two-year-old husband had filed a complaint saying it wasn't right for a man to spank another man's wife.

I left for City Hall in the midst of a heated discussion about where to run a story on British and Italian steamers being bombed off the coast of Spain. Everyone was blaming the Spaniards, but didn't know which of the two sides in their civil war was responsible. I didn't care if they ran it at all, I only wanted to tell Plato Largis and the chief of detectives what was coming. A more pow-

erful word than reluctant would have been needed to describe my feelings; yet I knew it was better to face the music than wait for them to read it in the paper.

Largis was surprisingly unperturbed. "Too bad," he said, "that you didn't tell me about the incident with the girl and the book the day we were out at the river."

"It never crossed my mind, Plato. When I saw it wasn't the same girl, there didn't seem to be any connection. The same dress, that was all."

"I'd like to see that picture. If it is Arnie Renna he'll be long gone as soon as the paper hits the street."

"Maybe he won't see it. Right away, I mean."

"Some of the boys will. He'll get the word. The girl was on foot, wasn't she? She couldn't have had far to go from the bookstore. Before the *Times-Press* gets circulated I'll fan men out along Howard Street and on Main from Ohio Edison south to Bowery. Maybe we'll get lucky." He picked up the phone and told someone on the other end to pull the mug shot on Arnie Renna from the photo file.

I walked down to Main Street and followed its wide expanse north through the lunch hour traffic to Wellington's office in

the Metropolitan Building. Jack Eddy wasn't there. I went back to where I had left my car that morning. Then it had been cool; now the glaring sunlight and noxious fumes from the orange buses going up and down Main Street had turned my stomach sour. I was wishing Jack had been in his office so our confrontation would have been behind me.

My worrying was for naught. Jack came hurrying into the boarding house after everyone was seated around the dining room table. Mrs. Bauer was going from place to place lading out substantial portions of beef stew. She looked at Jack and then at the clock on the sideboard, clucking her tongue.

"Just made it," he said, smiling at her before turning his head to wink at me. Ivy Bauer would forgive nearly anything except missing supper without letting her know ahead of time. Despite the smile I could see he was agitated, but the wink made me believe I wasn't the cause.

I followed him up to his room after the boarders and the Bauers had made short work of a cherry pie. Only on rare occasions would Jack discuss business at the table, having learned that Bus Bauer, the crusty head of the house, reacted skeptically and pudgy Mabel Klosterman would get

excited and start gushing.

"Well, buddy," he said, after closing the door behind us and turning on his table model radio, "you sure got things stirred up. Until they all showed up on Howard Street about two o'clock I didn't realize how many plain-clothes cops they had in Akron."

The radio came on with a roar: Wayne King's orchestra playing "The Waltz You Saved for Me." After Jack lowered the volume I said, "I was there a little after that and didn't see anybody. Then later I couldn't find Plato Largis. What happened?"

"Nothing. They were just in time for me to tell your detective friend that we found the office Renna used as a front, but he pulled out two days ago."

"Where did he go?"

Jack laughed as if to say I fell about three shades short of qualifying as a moron. "I can't tell you, friend. He wasn't considerate enough to leave a forwarding address."

"I thought maybe you found out," I said sheepishly.

"No such luck. But we know for certain he was here, and that should be enough to spring our client's son now that Largis has the whole story."

"What was Renna doing in Akron to begin with?"

"Turning hot money legiti-

mate. He was running a wholesale tire operation but it was just a front, a place for cleaning up mob money. You know, passing it through a business operation, making it seem accountable."

"Aren't you going after Renna?"

"For what? That isn't what we were hired to do."

"Even so I'd think you'd want to—"

"Look, pal, we're not operating a charitable organization and the government doesn't meet the agency payroll. Finding Renna is up to the cops. If they're even interested."

"Why wouldn't they be? That's their job."

"Right, up to a point. But even if they get him, all they can do is ship him back to prison in Illinois. Nobody's ever going to know who killed that girl, and they sure don't have enough to pin it on Arnie Renna."

"So that's it, then? If they turn your client's son loose that's all you care about?"

"Springing the kid is what we were paid to do, buddy."

"What about the other girl, Sue Baney?"

"What about her?"

"Won't Renna's boys still be after her?"

"Maybe, but now that his cover's blown they probably

won't exert themselves. Why should they?"

"I thought they liked to keep their books clear on things like that. And how will she know one way or another? Right now I wouldn't want to be in her shoes."

"That goes for a lot of people's shoes, but there isn't a thing that I can do about it. Quit stewing about a girl you saw once in your life and let's go get a beer."

We were halfway down the stairs when I stopped. "I can't, Jack. I promised Artie I'd help him with his racer."

Jack trailed along behind as I went down the basement steps. Artie had made progress. The framework was complete and he was holding a bolt of silver-colored oilcloth he planned to use as a cover. He didn't look up so I said, "Artie, you forgot to remind me I promised to give you a hand tonight."

"Huh!" he said. "I figured you was just lyin' again."

Jack went over and tested the steering wheel. "Hey, whaddya know, the kid did it right. He crossed the cables so the wheels turn the right way."

Artie glared at him. "It shows how in the rule book. You think I'm stupid or somethin'?"

"No, Artie," Jack said seriously, "I think you've done a real fine job. Better than I prob-

ably could have done. Suppose we give you a hand stretching that oilcloth? We can have the job finished in an hour and you'll be set for the big race."

"I can do it," said Artie without conviction.

Jack took the roll of oilcloth from him. "How're you going to get this heap out to Derby Downs for the inspection tomorrow?"

"Dad has to work so I'll push it, I guess."

"Don't talk nutty, it's miles away. We'll tie it on my car in the morning and run it out."

"No kidding?" Artie, grinning, brushed aside a mop of sandy hair that had fallen down over his eyes. "Thanks a lot, Jack."

I watched, shaking my head, smiling a little, as Jack started tacking the oilcloth to one side of the frame. A strange man, Jack Eddy. Driven by a need to climb the ladder, determined that nothing would get in his way, but kneeling now on the dirty basement floor totally wrapped up in a kid's Soap Box racer. For the moment nothing else existed for him.

I was reading the home edition on the front porch late the next afternoon when Mr. Reimer came out and sank heavily into a wicker chair. As always, the retired druggist

of sixty-seven was wearing a necktie. Mine was beside me on the swing and I had been giving serious thought to taking off my shirt, at least until Mrs. Bauer called us in to supper.

"They lost again," said Mr. Reimer. I knew he meant the Cleveland Indians. He never missed a game on the radio. "That puts them twenty games behind the Yankees, Abraham."

No one else ever called me by that name. I wouldn't have liked it, yet coming from Mr. Reimer it somehow seemed appropriate.

"The Akron Yankees are as bad off as the Indians," I said. "Fifteen games back of Springfield and their season ends even earlier than Cleveland's."

"Anything interesting in the paper?"

I handed him the front section. "They settled the strike in Detroit. The one at Plymouth. Twenty-one thousand went back to work today."

He nodded, then went, "Tchk, tchk, tchk!" so I knew he had seen the story about the doctor in Philadelphia killing himself after being convicted of raping a thirteen-year-old girl. Neither of us would have wanted to talk about it so I was glad to see Jack Eddy's Auburn pull up out front.

He came up the steps on the run, suitcoat buttoned despite the heat, a grey homburg resting at a jaunty angle on his head. "They turned Bill Talbot loose an hour ago," he said. "So that's that, buddy."

"Anything new on the girl?"

"What girl?"

"Sue Baney, for God's sake."

"Not that I heard. What's for chow?"

"Corned beef hash. Did you ask about her?"

"Slipped my mind." He went inside, which was just as well. Had he lingered I would have said something that later I might have regretted.

After supper I was ready to suggest walking down to the corner for a cool beer when Jack said he was taking Kitty Bauer to the Palace. "She wants to see that Henry Armetta stage show," he said.

Another evening alone. On impulse I looked at Mr. Reimer and said, "Want to take in a picture show?"

His face lit up. "Well, Abraham, there is one I've been wanting to see."

"Fine, let's go." I stood up. "What one?"

"The Shirley Temple picture at the Colonial, *Wee Willie Winkie*."

I turned away quickly so he couldn't see my face.

"The kid doesn't stand a chance." Jack's head hadn't stopped shaking from the

time we started walking along the rows of cars waiting for the race to begin. There were hundreds of them in a large tent topside at Derby Downs.

"You didn't really think he did?" I knew that Jack had never seen a Derby and had no way of judging before looking over the other entries. Even so I had expected him to recognize Artie's car as a clunker. "But some of these cars," I said, "are worse than Artie's."

"Yeah, about three. That one over there, the flat board without even a body on top, maybe he could beat that one. And don't tell me that kids put together some of these others without help. The shiny black job in the third row, it must have been built by General Motors."

"Some kids have machine shops at home. Or their dads do, so it's the same thing. You can't expect Artie to do as good a job with a saw and hammer, can you?"

Jack turned away and started back toward the open flag at the entrance. "I mean what's the use of entering if you don't shoot for the top prize?"

"The joy of competing."

"Oh, bull—" Jack caught my

smirk and punched my arm harder than necessary. "For a minute there, buddy, you almost had me believing you meant it."

Three cars in a heat, half the boys in Akron involved, the race seemed to go on forever. Heat after interminable heat in the August heat. Filmy clouds offered no protection from the sun; humidity rose in shimmering waves from the concrete surface of the track.

After every third heat a truck with siren screaming carried the winners back up the hill. Shorty Fulton, a pioneer flyer who ran the adjacent municipal airport and was a Derby prime mover, went by on a silver motorcycle every few minutes, up and down, back and forth, helping out where needed, keeping things moving along.

Jack had fashioned a hat out of a section of newspaper, but his nose was fiery red even before Artie's turn finally came. We were standing against a snow fence near the starting line, sweating like hogs so the dyed slats added vertical red stripes to my only decent white shirt.

I yelled, "Hey, Artie," as a crew of men wheeled his car down to the starting line. He didn't bother to glance our way. The car in the next lane was a

copy of Old Number 7, the Derby symbol. Its driver was a kid who hadn't missed many meals despite the Depression.

"Look at that tub o' lard," said Jack. "Must weigh two hundred. He'll be down the hill before Artie gets started."

"It doesn't matter how much he weighs, Jack. The car and driver together can't weigh more than two fifty."

"Yeah, and Artie and his add up to about half that. Some race this is going to be."

He was right, as usual. Old Number 7 was being loaded on the truck to take it back topside by the time Artie's car crept across the finish line. For a while it had looked like he wasn't even going to make it all the way down the hill.

"Well, that's that," said Jack. We made our way down to the grandstand, pushing through thousands of sticky people, many of whom didn't see the need of a daily shower. We squeezed into the seats the Bauers had managed to save for us, but Jack and Kitty soon wandered off to some shady spot.

Hours later a kid named Billy Wilson was crowned Akron champion, meaning he would run his white car again in the All-American race. Overnight it would be lettered *Akron Beacon Journal*. My competition got the credit and the publicity,

but it was deserved. Sports editor Jim Schlemmer, along with Fulton, did the lion's share of the work. On the Derby they had us licked all the way.

But the race had ended on a sad note. Shorty Fulton, excited when his son Bud qualified for the championship heat, had taken him topside on his motorcycle while Billy Wilson rode up on the truck. The crowd thought it was favoritism, forgetting the man's natural exuberance and all he had done to make the race possible, so they booed as the motorcycle went by. Not everyone, of course. Some of us sat quietly wondering what it was that made people tick.

After searching through a steaming mob of kids and their racers, and seeing a disconsolate Bud Fulton sitting off alone by himself, we finally found Artie. He was strutting around like a big shot in his Derby T-shirt and helmet. We helped load his racer on the top of Bus Bauer's ancient Oakland sedan, then Jack and I headed for home in his Auburn. The line to use the bathtub would soon grow long at the boarding house so Jack laid a heavy foot on the accelerator once we were clear of the traffic fanning out from Derby Downs.

We were cruising along Massillon Road, approaching Mar-

ket Street, when Jack whistled between his teeth and slowed down. At the first driveway he pulled in, backed out again, and then coasted to a stop behind a deep blue Terraplane sedan. I sighed a weary protest. "Now what, for Pete's sake?"

"Bad guys up ahead. C'mon, let's go inside." For the first time I noticed we were parked across the street from the apartment once occupied by Mary Eagleson and Sue Baney. Jack laid a hand on my arm as I opened the door. "Don't stare as we go by."

I didn't, but Jack gave the two occupants of the car a long look so they would be aware that they had been noticed. He didn't explain why my staring would have been any different. When we were inside the building Jack took the stairs two at a time and I hurried along behind, suddenly wondering what we might be getting into, not cheered by the possibilities that leaped to mind.

Without a key this time, Jack pounded on the door of the apartment. To my surprise a cautious voice from the other side said, "Who's there?" It was a man and he didn't sound like a mobster.

"Jack Eddy, Wellington Agency." The door cracked open, then swung back just as Jack started to give it a push. He

stopped short, scowling as he pointed a finger at the lanky man in front of us. "Talbot," he said, "what in hell are you doing here?"

It took a moment for the name to register. Bill Talbot, the son of Jack's former client, out of jail now that he no longer was suspected of murdering his girlfriend.

"He's with me." Sue Baney, minus her pixieish smile, was standing near the window at the front of the apartment. "We saw you coming and Bill said he knew you, but we had to be sure. There are men out there watching us."

"Not watching you, doll," said Jack. "Waiting for you, or getting ready to come in after you. What the devil made you come here? And how did the two of you get together?"

"I called Bill at his rooming house when he got out of jail," the girl said. "And now I want to get the rest of my clothes—and some other stuff."

"Talk about dumb."

"We're going to call the police." Sue was hesitant in announcing it, apparently anticipating Jack's disapproval.

"And have them do what? Tell those monkeys outside they can't park on a public street?"

"We'll ask them to escort us to my car."

"And stay with you the rest

of the day? Wise up, sis."

She was badly frightened. With good reason, and I knew Jack was right in not wanting to ease her mind. Downplaying the danger wouldn't be doing her a favor. "What do they want with you?" he said.

"I can identify Mr. Brown. I mean that Renna man."

"Come off it, kiddo. Arnie Renna has troops but not an army. He's not going to show his face around here in the future so you're meaningless on that score. Since he's got men on you, there's more to it than that."

Sue Baney and Bill Talbot exchanged glances, then in a near whisper she said, "I took his papers. His record books."

Jack whistled again. "You took Renna's books? Why, for God's sake? You'd have been better off stealing the twenty-dollar printing plates from the treasury department."

She was close to tears. "I thought it might help put him in jail. I sneaked back in after ... after what they did to Mary."

Jack was suddenly solicitous. "Well, what's done is done." He went to the window, approaching it from the side and looking down to the street without showing himself. He turned away and for a moment stood quietly. "Okay," he said when

he had formulated a plan, "here's what we'll do . . ."

Jack and I went out the front door laughing. Mine was forced, hollow. Jack started horsing around and when we got to the street he grabbed the ball cap from my head and sailed it to the opposite curb. I went after it, trying to pretend it was all in fun and that I was enjoying myself.

What came next was as risky as anything I had ever done, but I had agreed to go along with Jack's foolhardy scheme. With me on the curb side legitimately now, we walked toward the Auburn on opposite sides of the Terraplane. Jack continued his meaningless banter, but I was beyond taking further part in it.

When we were beside the doors of the Terraplane, each of us grabbed one and jerked it open. Before the men inside had any idea of what was happening we had dragged them out and pinned them down. Mine was a little guy, swarthy and ferret-faced. A couple of quick punches put him out of action. When I stood up, Jack was grinning at me from the street side of the car. It was the crazy sort of escapade he dearly loved.

He dragged his victim by the heels and laid him beside mine on the devil strip between the curb and sidewalk. A few cars

went by, slowing to see what was going on, but no one stopped. Under the circumstances it was hard to blame them.

Jack did what I had forgotten to do: took an ugly automatic from the little man's belt. He handed it and another like it to me, then had me help him dump the little man in the back seat of the Auburn. After that he went back and slapped the one still on the ground a few times and jerked him up to a sitting position. When the hoodlum was capable of functioning again, Jack shoved him into the Terraplane and told him he'd skin him alive if he ever saw him around there again.

The man was in no mood to argue. When the Terraplane was out of sight, Jack slid behind the wheel of the Auburn, made a screeching U-turn, and headed downtown. If Sue Boney and Bill Talbot followed orders, they would be close behind on their way to checking into the Hotel Akron around the corner from the Wellington Agency office. Jack hadn't said so, but I assumed into separate rooms.

Downtown Akron was quiet late on a Saturday afternoon. Drunks were not an uncommon sight on Main Street; anyone who noticed us supporting the little man between us as we entered the Metropolitan Build-

ing wouldn't have found it of interest. Our captive was conscious again, but his legs were wobbly. The Wellington office was closed for the day; only a burly operative was on hand to man the telephone. Jack told him to lock up the guns we had confiscated, then we followed the hallway to his office.

The little man was not happy. He cast his black, rodent-like eyes around the small room, trying to appear surly and tough but unable to conceal his fear. Wellington had a fine reputation among reputable citizens, but was known in the underworld as brutal. Aware that the laws governing the police—and they were none too strict in 1937—were often ignored by the agency, I had a feeling I should be elsewhere. A way of arranging that without losing face escaped me.

Jack didn't ease my mind when he tied the hoodlum to a straight-backed wooden chair. The husky operative had joined us, standing in the center of the room staring down at the prisoner. He and Jack exchanged unpleasant grins, then Jack sat on the edge of his desk, one leg planted on the floor, the other swinging back and forth. "Let's make this easy on everybody," he said, his brown eyes fixed on the little man. "Tell us where Arnie Renna is holed up and you can walk out the door."

Renna's soldier glared at him, displaying an air of bravado that didn't run very deep. Jack turned to me, nodding toward the door as he said, "Buddy, how about going up front and making a call. Say we're tied up and won't make supper."

He wanted me out of the room and that was fine with me. I had just hung up the phone after trying to make Mrs. Bauer understand our need to be elsewhere at dinnertime when Sue Baney and Bill Talbot arrived. They were settled in the hotel and were reporting as ordered for further instructions. I didn't mention the bookstore because I had decided the girl didn't remember me. Her face was flushed from the activity. Being excited made her even more attractive.

There were several muffled cries from down the hall, leading Sue and Talbot to glance at each other or toward me, but within five minutes Jack came out, a big smile on his face. "Renna and a few of the boys are hiding out in a house on Mogadore Road."

He read the address from a slip of paper, then told Sue and Talbot to go back to the hotel, stay in their rooms, and have dinner sent up. Nodding for me to follow he said, "Let's grab a sandwich, buddy. A couple of our best men are on their way in. When they get here we'll

run out and pay Renna a call."

When we were away from the others I said, "For God's sake, Jack, this is for the birds. It's a police job, let them handle it. What do you hope to prove?"

"Maybe we can swing a deal. Renna gets his books, the kids are off the hook for good."

"Would you believe Renna even if he agreed? And you'd just let him go on his way? Come on, Jack, the man belongs in jail, you know that. And what happened to change your mind about working a case without having a client? Who do you figure on billing for this?"

He only grinned as if to say he knew all the answers but wasn't sharing. I took one final shot: "It looks to me like this is something that could cost you your license."

He seemed surprised. "License? Where'd you come up with that idea, watching some movie? You don't need a license to operate in Ohio."

"What about that goon back at your office?"

"We'll keep him on ice for a while, then turn him over to the cops for packing a gun. For that you need a license."

We ate hamburgers down the street at Ptomaine Tommie's. Jack picked up the check, but that hardly compensated for missing one of Mrs. Bauer's meals. Not that it mattered,

under the circumstances nothing would have tasted good. Two hard-looking Wellington operatives were waiting when we got back. If the opportunity had come along before they joined the agency, they could have been working the other side of the law. The phone rang while Jack was briefing them in his office. A moment later the burly man pulling desk duty poked his head in the door and said, "That broad that was here wants you on the phone, Jack."

He picked it up, listened a minute, then slammed his fist down on the desk. All he said was, "How long ago?" and then, "Sit tight where you are. No, come on back here, that'll be better yet."

"What's up?" I said when he was off the phone.

"Our friend Talbot took off. In Sue Baney's car. With Arnie Renna's books."

I was stunned. "What for?"

"What do you mean what for? To cut a deal for himself, what else. Thinks he can get enough out of them to fix himself up for life. Greedy damn fool, he doesn't know his men. I should have been smarter than to give out the address while he was around." He hit the desk another blow. "Who would have believed he'd do something so nutty? He's got a fifteen minute head start on us, so by the time

we get there he'll probably be fish bait."

"What took her so long to call?"

"No phone in her room. She had to go down to the lobby."

We didn't wait for the elevator, charging instead down the stairs, an incongruous parade of wild-eyed characters with me bringing up the rear. Fortunately no one else was walking up or down at the time.

I sat in the back of the Auburn with one of the operatives while Jack broke all speed limits and ran two red lights in driving east on Market Street. Before that I had seen Sue Bane hurrying toward the Wellington office when we turned the corner off Main onto Market. Her face was chalky white as she cast a frightened glance over her shoulder, as if certain she was being pursued. The sidewalk was empty.

It was a long ride to Mogadore Road. The sun was low in the sky behind us but it had done its work; the spacious lawn at City Hospital was brown and tinder-dry from weeks of its punishing rays. I had loads of time to think about Jack's having issued guns to the other operatives and tucking one in his own belt. Remembering some of the scrapes I had been in with him when he said a gun wasn't necessary set my stomach to churning at the thought of what

might lie ahead.

We had slowed down to check house numbers on Mogadore Road when a block ahead the blue Terraplane pulled out of a driveway and came toward us. It hadn't had time to gain speed so we had a clear view of the occupants. The driver was the one we had encountered earlier at the apartment. Renna was beside him and in the back a frightened Bill Talbot was seated close to a fourth man.

The street was too narrow for a U-turn so Jack swung into a driveway and executed a quick reverse. The Terraplane had a substantial lead, but Renna and his men didn't realize they were being pursued. In no time we were riding their rear bumper. Only when Jack was swinging out to pass, hoping to cut them off, did they realize what was happening. Then the Terraplane shot ahead. It was newer and faster than the Auburn, but would need time to open a substantial lead. As it careened onto Market Street, heading east toward Canton Road, I plotted its route in my head. Once past the small Ellet suburban business district Renna's speedy sedan would be in open country and any hope we had of overtaking them would be gone.

Soon after we had taken the corner on two wheels and were speeding south on Canton Road

a block behind the Terraplane, a police car passed going the other way. It made a fast turn and joined the chase, but was hopelessly outdistanced.

I looked forward again just in time to see an ancient Essex pull out from a side street. It was well ahead of the Terraplane, but not at that speed. The brakes screeched and it went into a skid, coming around so we could see the driver fighting the wheel.

It was like watching a movie in slow motion. The Terraplane went on and on in its slide, the wheels facing us gradually lifting until I could see the others beyond them. I saw it slowly go over all the way so it was on its side, then suddenly everything seemed to speed up and it went tumbling over and over like a bug on a steep incline. I saw the doors open and bodies go flying out. I saw them hit the street and go rolling and I saw the battered top of the car come down on the one I knew was Arnie Renna.

Then it was finished and for a moment there was an eerie silence. I hadn't even been aware of Jack braking the Auburn until I realized we had stopped. The others were out and running to different places by the time my feet touched the brick pavement. Only when a policeman came hurrying up from the car behind did it dawn on me

that I had a pencil and paper in hand and was already making notes.

Arne Renna and his two henchmen were dead, Bill Talbot critically injured but alive in City Hospital. That, if Jack Eddy was correct, was a better fate than awaited him had we arrived sixty seconds later than we did. The little man who cracked under pressure was in jail on a weapons charge, but not for long. There was no evidence linking him to the death of Mary Eagleson, and wouldn't be. He had stopped singing, but the word would soon be out that he had. His prospects for a long life were slim.

Jack had dropped me off at the boarding house on Dudley Street before going back to his office. After some tut-tutting from Mrs. Bauer I cleaned up and changed clothes, then drove downtown to write my story. On impulse, or perhaps design, I first stopped at the Metropolitan Building. A different operative was handling the phone at Wellington's. Jack was at work on his report, punching the typewriter keys with two fingers.

Sue Baney was there, too. Later I admitted to myself that this was why I hadn't gone directly to the *Times-Press* office. She was still frightened, un-

sure of what she should do. She didn't want to go back to her apartment or even walk around the corner to the Hotel Akron.

"Have you eaten?" I asked, and she shook her head. "Come on, let's get something. It will do you good."

She was hesitant. Jack told her there was no point in hanging around any longer, her troubles were over. When she looked to me for confirmation, I nodded. She smiled a tentative smile, still not completely convinced, then said okay. I waited while she freshened up in the restroom.

"Do you mean it, Jack?" I said. "You don't think she's in any danger?"

"From who? These were Chicago people, buddy. No ties to any of the boys in Akron. Even if there had been, they'd lay off now that Renna's books are in the hands of the police. For all the good it'll do them, from what I saw. Meaningless stuff now. No way to tie any of it to anybody still alive."

"Okay, just so you're sure."

"I'm certain sure."

"I wouldn't want to give her a bum steer, that's all."

"You haven't and you won't. Now will you scram out of here and let me finish this report sometime tonight?"

"Okay." I closed the door behind me, then opened it again. "Jack?"

"Now what?" He was scowling from behind the typewriter.

"Well, I'm glad you spotted those mugs outside the apartment this afternoon. Otherwise . . ."

"Yeah. So leave now, okay?"

"Okay." I closed the door again as Sue Baney came toward me along the hall. In the cool of late evening we walked to the LaPaix, a quiet restaurant at Market and High catty-corner from her hotel and a block east of Communist Party Headquarters. The tablecloths were white and the waiters wore dinner jackets, but the menu was more at home in Akron than it would have been in Paris.

When we were settled at a quiet table off by itself, Sue managed one of her pixieish smiles.

"I remember you now," she said. "You were in the bookstore the day—" Her face clouded over again.

"It's finished," I told her. "What happened wasn't your fault."

"If I hadn't gone back and mentioned it to Mr. Brown—I mean Renna. Or if I had just warned Mary so she wouldn't have borrowed the blue dress for her date that night because she liked it so much . . ."

"And if Renna hadn't picked Akron to set up his operation and if you hadn't taken a job with him. You can go on forever

once you start saying *if*."

She smiled again. "I suppose you're right. Now that I'm out of a job I probably should go back home to Parsons."

"Where's that?"

"In West Virginia."

"I might have guessed. If everybody from West Virginia left Akron tonight it would be a ghost town." I hesitated, working up the courage to say,

for once in my life, what was on my mind. "Look, uh, why don't you try for another job here in town?"

"Why?" She sat looking at me from across the table, waiting for an answer. I had one for her, but my tongue was frozen and I could feel the color rising to my cheeks. Then, when she understood, she smiled in a way I wouldn't forget.

IS YOUR COLLECTION COMPLETE?



- ☐ #27 MURDER & OTHER MISHAPS (\$4.50)
- ☐ #26 SHROUDS & POCKETS (\$4.50)
- ☐ #25 MOST WANTED (\$4.50)
- ☐ #24 THE SHADOW OF SILENCE (\$4.50)
- ☐ #23 A BRIEF DARKNESS (\$4.50)
- ☐ #22 A MYSTERY BY THE TALE (\$4.50)
- ☐ #21 WORDS OF PREY (\$4.50)
- ☐ #19 GRAVE SUSPICIONS (\$3.50)
- ☐ #18 CRIME WATCH (\$3.50)
- ☐ #17 MORTAL ERRORS (\$3.50)
- ☐ #16 A CHOICE OF EVILS (\$3.50)
- ☐ #15 BORROWERS OF THE NIGHT (\$3.50)
- ☐ #14 FATAL ATTRACTIONS (\$3.50)
- ☐ #13 DEATH REACH (\$3.50)
- ☐ ANTHOLOGY # 8 (\$3.50)

Please send me the ALFRED HITCHCOCK ANTHOLOGIES indicated. Enclosed is my check or money order for \$ _____.

Mail to: ALFRED HITCHCOCK
ANTHOLOGIES
P.O. Box 40
Vernon, NJ 07462

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery.
Available only in the U.S.

HCGC-3

FICTION

Ash

by Charles Garvie



Illustration by Tim Foley

32

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ashley had sworn that he'd come back. It was the last thing he'd said as Wishart pushed him out of the window, and although Wishart wasn't the superstitious type, he'd had him cremated anyway. Just in case.

But it seemed as if he needn't have worried. Ashley seemed quite content to stay under his rose tree in the Garden of Remembrance, and never did the soft swish of ashy feet sound in Wishart's hallway or pace past his bolted door. Until he began to court Elinor again.

Elinor had been Wishart's girl at university back in '82, but of recent years she had been more taken with the charms of elder brother Ashley and his rancid Porsche. Even though the car phone kept ringing every time they went out together.

But it hadn't been any good. Elinor had fallen for the thirty-five thousand per annum and the second house in Brighton, and Wishart had been forced to do the sporting and gentlemanly thing and push his sod of a brother out of the window. Which hadn't been at all easy.

However, once he'd finally managed to spin a yarn good enough to lure the lout round to his flat in Battersea, it had been quite easy to convince him that there was a wounded bird on the ledge and that he, Wis-

hart, was too scared of heights to go out and get it. After that it had been, more or less, plain sailing. Less in the sense that Ashley had hung on tenaciously to his fat life and Wishart had had to be very careful just how he whacked his brother's grasping little fingers with the walking stick, but more once the deed was done and the police and public had swallowed, hook, line, and sinker, his story of Ashley's fatal accident whilst trying to save the life of a tiny fledgling sparrow. The fat greaseball had even made it to the front page of the local paper. Still Wishart was cautious.

But his fears seemed groundless until the Fatal First Night he brought Elinor round to the flat. They had been to a concert at the South Bank—Elinor's first Public Appearance, as the saying goes, since the death of her fiancé—and she had confided to him over coffee that she really needed to get out more and that she was glad to have an old friend like him to rely on. So Wishart's heart sang. And then sank as he saw the delicate flakes of ash fluttering against the windowpane.

Wishart froze. Despite the central heating. But there was no denying it. Snowflake-cute and bobbing like a syncopated defector from *Fantasia* it flut-

tered and pirouetted against the neon-pierced velvet of the night sky. Ash. Ashley's ash.

Wishart pulled himself together, drew the curtains, and closed his mind.

But he slipped up three weeks later when, bowled over with excitement, because she'd let him kiss her cheek when he escorted her home the previous night, he was too busy putting on his kid gloves to notice that he'd not only left the curtains open but the window as well.

And it had been quite a descent from Seventh Heaven when one moment they'd been kissing passionately on the settee and the next some gentle gossamer-floating-thing had lightly stroked his cheek and drifted daintily onto his lap.

He'd screamed. No, let's be honest here. He'd yelled his head off and cried like a baby. And it had taken the puzzled Elinor almost ten minutes to finally quiet him down and another half hour to get back to where they had left off on the couch.

But the Grand Finale came two weeks later when she rose from the settee and, taking his hand, smiled her Little-Girl-Lost smile and asked coyly where the bedroom was. And, with Wishart's heart doing rapid-succession press-ups, they glided through the open door and

floated down onto the snowy white bedspread which was, of course, covered in a fine white flour-light dusting of—all together now—ash.

It was the straw the camel dreads, and Wishart went berserk, screaming and wailing and clutching at Elinor's skirt and burying his face in her lap as she tried to comfort him. And then, of course, the fool went and blurted out the whole sordid story.

But she took it calmly and patted and there-there'd him at all the appropriate places, and when he was done she went and got her handbag for tissues to dab his eyes with. And they sat there like that for some time while he sobbed and she crooned fairy tales (yes, fairy tales—this was one screwed-up lady) in his ear to console him.

"There now, there now," she soothed. "Dry your eyes and Elinor will tell you a story. A sad story that happened long, long ago. Listen . . .

"Once upon a time there lived a Beautiful Maiden who loved a Scholar, but as the Scholar was never likely to rise beyond the village of Battersea, the Maiden decided to marry the Fat Prince, confident that once she had his fortune some misfortune would befall him. However, unbeknownst to her, the Scholar, inflamed with jeal-

ousy, slew the Fat Prince before the Maiden could lay claim to his loot, and can you guess what the Maiden did to the silly Scholar when he finally spilled the beans, Wishart?"

But there was no glittering star prize behind the red and gold dappled curtains for solving this particular little conundrum, and the disgustingly convenient crime writer's standby with the mother-of-pearl handle which had appeared in her hand gave the game away even before the roar of the explosion seared his eardrums.

In fact, the blast was so loud that under normal circumstances grumpy old Mr. Peterson from next door would have been shuffling over to moan about the noise, but as he was sitting at his kitchen table writing an irate letter to the factory at the bottom of the road at the time, he missed the whole show.

Their damned incinerator had developed the filthy habit of blowing ash through his front windows and he wasn't standing for it. After all, if everybody just threw their ash around un-

checked, it wouldn't be long before people were suffocating in the damn stuff and dropping dead because of it. And, believe you me, *he* wasn't going to end up being found dead in his living room after fighting the last war for a cleaner place to live.

But, unfortunately, the Fates were working from a different script, and even as his pen flew over the Basildon Bond, Elinor was easing up the latch on his front door and creeping stealthily up behind him.

Not that she had any real need to get rid of the old fool, of course, because he'd heard nothing and didn't know she existed anyway. But Elinor was a methodical worker and just liked to be sure of everything. After all, that was the trouble with the world today, wasn't it? You never *could* be sure that some maniac with a gun wasn't going to walk in off the street and mow down two innocent, unconnected people. Or even, for that matter, that a truck wouldn't career blindly off the road and strike a hurrying girl because the driver got dust in his eyes. Or maybe even ash?

FICTION

—Paid— in Full

by W. W.
Fredericks

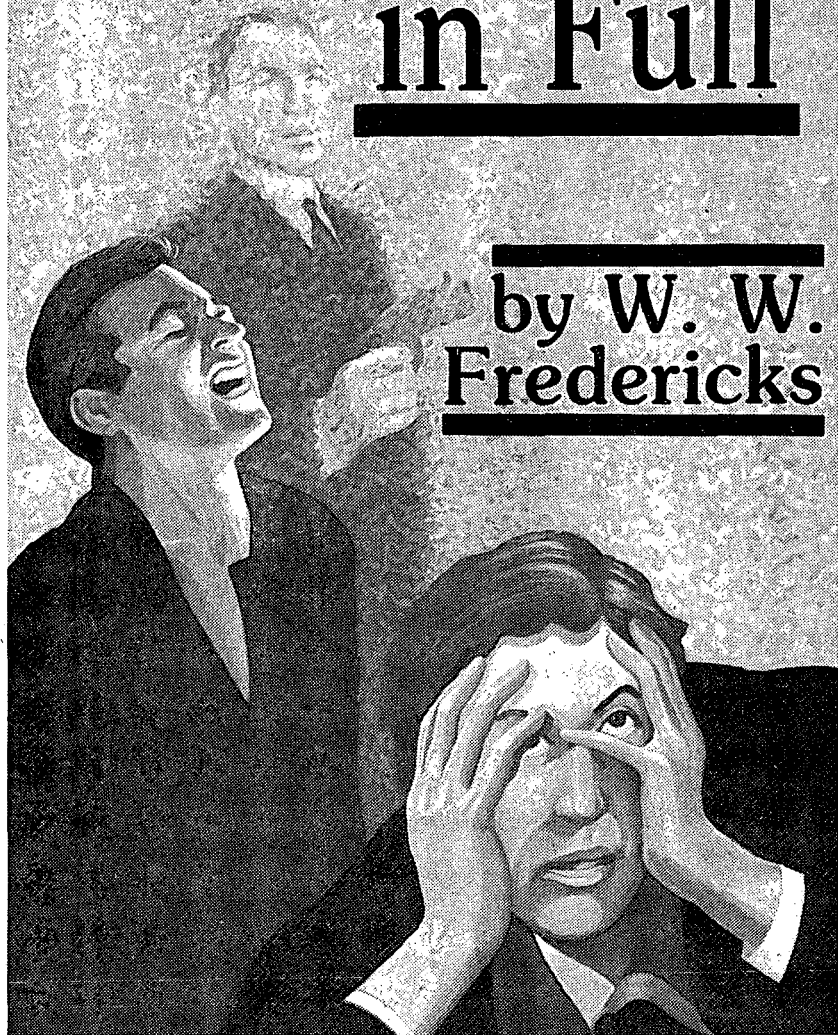


Illustration by Mark Fresh

I remember the moment I became friends with Richard Devane. It was at a producer's party, the kind where the show's stars and pretty girls mingle with the financial backers, media types, and all the hangers-on who could scrounge invitations. Devane, short and round, always affected a white scarf and dark jacket which emphasized the black-white contrast of his ebony eyebrows and pure white hair.

As critics for rival Boston newspapers, we knew each other's work intimately and each other not at all. He had been writing about the theater for forty years. I had been doing the job for eighteen months, since moving over from news.

Devane's wit was evident in both his writing that I admired so much and his conversation, which I had briefly shared on a few occasions. His pleasure in his cleverness was obvious and had earned him the nickname "Richard the Vain." Until that night, I had assumed he took himself seriously. I was standing among a circle of six listening to Devane's quips, stories, and word plays when he realized the others would laugh at anything he said, funny or not. He dismissed them with a wave of his hand, saying, "Now leave us, I wish to tell the competition how to do his job."

I was smiling at a slim blonde

who was sliding away when Devane's low rumble of a voice said, "She is, shall we say, an intimate of our hosts, the wonderful Garrio brothers. Her job is to provide a little glamor, flirt with the bylines and moneybags, but always go home with a Garrio."

Devane's lips were pressed together as he shook his head, his eyes following the doxy.

"Her name's Lea Harling," he said. "She was a good actress, a good singer too. Not too smart, but she had the right instincts. She was just about to make the jump from ingenue to second billing when the parts started drying up. The rumor is that her morals were never a problem—for her or anyone else—and she was given a leading role in the Garrios' private lives." He paused, then added, "I don't think she ever knew that the parts stopped coming because the two Garrios declared her off-limits."

"Another uplifting tale of backstage life," I said.

"That's why they act," replied Devane.

I turned to face him and said, "Your monologue to the group was very amusing. But, if I counted correctly, you stole three quotes from Churchill, two from Disraeli, and one from Saki."

Devane began to smile.

"And," I continued, "you knew

you weren't going to be discovered by any of the bunch: each theft was from one of the Englishmen's speeches or a lesser-known writing. Richard Devane, I believe your strength is in your memory, not your wit."

His amusement grew into laughter, and he held his drink with both hands to prevent its spilling.

"Oh, Stephens, I knew you were going to be trouble. That first month, when you referred to the original set design of *The Price*, I thought, Oh, hell, he knows his theater. And when you dismembered Galsworthy on your way to picking apart Joyce, I decided you weren't the idiot-reporter-turned-critic I had hoped for."

"Sorry to disappoint."

"Well, now I have some intelligent reviews to read—besides my own. And," he sighed with mock pomposity, "the life of a king is boring, except for challenges to his throne."

"Should we just start throwing Oscar Wilde's epigrams at each other?" I asked. "We seem to be heading that way."

"No, Stephens, we both know them all anyway. It wouldn't impress either one of us. Care to try a real conversation?"

"Don't mind if I do," I said, and we began an alternately highbrow, lowbrow discussion of Arthur Miller's work and his marriage to Marilyn Monroe.

Devane's recall of productions and performances was faultless, his memory prodigious and exact. Maneuvering him into the areas of musical comedy, Shakespeare, light comedy, and the heavy-handed proletarian dramas of the Depression, I could find no cracks in his knowledge.

"Does the professor pass the student's test?" Devane chided, mockingly.

"With full honors," I said. And from then on we were excellent friends.

Later I understood that Devane's flamboyant image was clever PR. For a critic, the basic equation is taste plus fame equals power, and everyone knew Richard Devane. From a distance, he was a hard man to understand. Although married, he was frequently photographed with young women at his side and he never mentioned his wife, who was not seen in public. Under the gossips' eyes, Devane enjoyed the attention of beautiful women, which led to constant speculation. The rumormongers were always disappointed by the lack of proof; they failed to realize that Devane flirted with the old women too, out of kindness, while playing on the younger ones out of duty.

I met Virginia Devane at their house, where she was lying in the bed she had occupied for

the past four years after her kidneys began to malfunction and a stroke made her left side useless. I often had dinner at their house. It was bad form for rival critics to be good friends, so we only exchanged polite greetings in public. Devane suggested once that it would be more fitting if we just growled at each other.

I had considered myself well versed in the theater, but then my education truly began. In theatrical discussions, I was a poor match for Devane. I would read heavily on one or two subjects before each dinner and steer the talk into my staked-out territory. I felt like a general with too few troops, forced to depend upon tactical skirmishes until my army was strong enough for honest battle. Devane's greatest advantage was his four decades of experience, so I spent dozens of hours in the microfilm room of the city library, studying his early reviews and articles. He was sixty-four now and had covered everything from Albee to *Gigi* and *Sweeney Todd* to Shaffer.

Devane and I used to sit in Virginia's room and argue our points across her bed. The stroke had permanently depleted her energy, but her mind and personality were left intact. She rarely spoke and usually kept her eyes closed, but a half-smile

or raised eyebrow proved her attention. Each night I left the two of them upstairs, Devane in his chair, holding her hand and reading aloud until she fell asleep. As I left the house on summer nights, I could hear the soothing steadiness of his voice drifting down from the open window.

Two years after that first party, we were at the Barrymore Theater for the opening of yet another Garrio brothers production. The lobby was packed, the crowd able to move only in a tight shuffle-step. With difficulty, an arm could be raised to brush the February snow from a shoulder or lapel. Devane was in his usual place, halfway up the left staircase, looking down at the crowd, smiling and nodding to those who waved or called his name. The white scarf and hair and the dark eyebrows made him recognizable even to those whose vanity kept their glasses in a pocket until the house lights went down.

The opening was of a musical held over in Philadelphia for a month while show doctors tried to breathe some life into it. According to rumor, the songs were instantly forgettable, the humor was sit-com quality, and the female lead was eating garlic twice a day to spite the male lead, her former husband. To

cover the absence of good writing, good acting, or good music, the Garrios had added a high-priced comic, a nude love scene performed in silhouette behind a scrim, and plenty of double-entendres. That the setting had been switched from Brooklyn 1950's to New Orleans 1930's to Maine 1900 did not bode well. While interviewing a veteran understudy the week before, I was told—off the record—that the cast of *Hope for Love* was calling the show *Hope for a Miracle*.

The Barrymore is majestic, with its neoclassical friezes, its intricately carved arches, and the murals on the vaulted ceiling painted by an obvious admirer of Michelangelo. Seating capacity was twenty-seven hundred and, by tradition, the top critics were placed on the aisle so that as the final curtain came down, they could get out quickly to make their deadlines.

I was always pleased to have Devane in the seat in front of me, as he was tonight, for he was short enough that my view was never blocked. The lobby lights had dimmed twice, and most people were in their seats when the orchestra did its best with an unpromising overture. The show's first act was as bad as I'd feared or, to be honest, as terrible as I had hoped. The male lead/former husband went

flat three times on his first song, and the cast's accents were a free-wheeling melange of Brooklyn, Southern, and Down East.

If it's true, as most actors believe, that the number of coughs indicate a show's appeal, this one was either a bomb or being played before an outpatient ward. One man in my row was hacking so badly he left, coughing, wheezing, and whispering apologies as he moved through the darkness during a scene change.

To a critic, a bad show can be a joy. A scathing review usually makes better reading than words of praise, for the same reason, I suspect, that villains are inherently more interesting than heroes. I was waiting to see the slow shake of Devane's head as he started to scribble his scorn, but he was still watching.

As the first-act curtain fell to barely perfunctory applause, I leaned forward to ask Devane whether he intended to be bombastic or smoothly devastating. Instead, I found myself staring at a single red-edged hole in the back of his head. Disbelieving, I pulled myself upright and leaned over his left shoulder. His eyes were still, locked in a frozen stare.

Time slowed with my adrenaline rush and I remembered a train wreck I'd covered. The

survivors had been stunned, unable to fit sudden death into their ordinary lives. Now I understood them. My chest felt tight and I tried for a deep breath. My lungs hesitated, as if they had forgotten how, then pulled in new air and my mind began to clear. I realized that many people in the audience were standing now and moving towards the lobby. Nothing I did would save Richard Devane, but I could act with the discipline he would expect.

I pulled out a handkerchief and folded it across Devane's forehead as I tilted his head back against the seat. His eyelids I brushed closed as I took my hand from the handkerchief. With his face up, the bullet hole couldn't be seen. His heart must have stopped pumping immediately because only a little blood had oozed out and trickled down his collar.

The aisle was on the left and the seat on Devane's right was empty. I didn't know the man on the other side of it. I leaned toward him and in a half-whisper said, "Hey," with an unpleasant sharpness that made him look up.

"My friend's not well. I want you to make sure no one comes through this way and that no one bothers him."

The man's expression was uncertain behind his tortoiseshell glasses. He stammered for

an answer, then looked at the hefty woman beside him. She leaned forward and in a take-charge voice said, "Don't worry. I'll make sure nobody goes through here." I nodded and turned away, certain that no one would challenge her.

The aisle was jammed and I wouldn't be able to work my way up to the lobby for several minutes. I moved down the six rows to the orchestra pit, saw the small ladder in the far left corner, and used it. A few musicians were still in their small folding chairs, and I recognized one of the surprised faces.

"Hello, Margaret," I said to the oboist, forcing my voice to be casual. "Where's that phone you all get in trouble for using?"

Taken aback by my invasion of stagehouse territory, she just pointed.

The conductor was on the phone and a second man was waiting to use it. I pulled a roll of bills out of my pocket, and holding a twenty in each hand, gestured towards each of them at eye level. Almost in unison they nodded, the conductor saying, "Must run," as he hung up and the other man stepping back with a flourish. When I handed them the money, I said it was a personal call, and they willingly walked away, admiring their quick profit.

What I was doing would seem

callous, almost ghoulish, to a normal person. Perhaps detachment is a reporter's way of resisting shock—using objectivity to seal off the cave of emotions.

The operator at the paper put me through to Frank, the front page editor. I told him what had happened, and he told someone next to him to slow down the first edition run; everything above the fold would be rebuilt.

"Okay, ready," he said to me and I dictated about seven hundred words off the top of my head, heavy on setting and circumstances, Devane's prominence and the show itself. I made him repeat Devane's age.

"And don't let some idiot change it," I said. "I don't care what source he gets it from. Also, lay out the story, then call the police. Send a photographer over here now so he's in position when things start happening. Another reporter should work the lobby as the audience leaves. And, Frank, play it straight. Don't even think of using 'Death on the Aisle' as a subhead. Leave me a lot of room on the jump page for a long add and a second story."

Frank was good. In his early fifties, he had never missed a typo and had covered so many stories as a reporter or editor that nothing excited him any more. That's the kind of person you want handling the front page.

I went back to my seat as the lights were dimming again. The police arrived twenty minutes into the second act. A cop in uniform and the theater manager came down the aisle and knelt next to Devane. Using the manager's penlight, the cop first looked at Devane, then flicked the light into my face. He shut it off as he told the manager, "Stop the show."

The whole cast was on stage for a song and dance number. The manager, deferentially hunched over to avoid blocking anyone's view, hurried to the back of the loge seating. The order was relayed by a technician on the lighting board, and the curtain was brought down at the song's end. The cop's arrival had started the audience murmuring, and they craned their necks to see what was happening. Five more policemen came down the aisle as the lights went up, and a voice on the loudspeaker said that due to "extraordinary circumstances" the rest of the show had been cancelled and patrons were to keep their ticket stubs for reimbursement or use at another performance. The audience was requested to leave the theater, but police told the approximately thirty people in seats near Devane to remain. The rest departed reluctantly, looking over their shoulders while being herded out.

"Are you Stephens?" one cop asked me.

I nodded.

"Your paper called us. Why the hell didn't you call us when this happened?"

"Can you bring dead men back to life?" I asked.

He didn't like my attitude and switched tactics.

"Because of you we'll probably never catch the guy who killed him."

"Tell me what you would have done differently thirty minutes ago."

His response was to narrow his eyes and give me an "I'm remembering your face for the next time" look. I didn't care.

A Lieutenant Featherstone arrived to take charge. Photos were taken, the coroner came and left, and the remaining audience members whispered among themselves as they watched the police. No one had seen anything exceptional. The timid man and his big wife told of my wanting to make sure Devane wasn't disturbed—which, I pointed out, also served to avoid a panic and preserve the evidence. After names and addresses were taken, everyone else was allowed to leave. Featherstone began quizzing me. A nasty look sprang into the first cop's eyes when Featherstone noted I had the best seat for killing Devane. But the lieutenant neatly reversed field

by commenting that only an idiot would consider it for long.

"You're a possibility, Stephens, but not a good one. And a conspiracy among the group of you sitting near Devane is ridiculous. A long-range shot is out—too many variables and probably the wrong kind of bullet. My other problem is 'Why here?' No plan is foolproof, and the logistics are dangerous. It's a lot safer to have an 'accidental' death some other place, by shredding the electric wiring at his house or slipping an air bubble into an artery. Also, we can forget mistaken identity. Devane was too well-known, and even in the dark that white hair stands out."

Featherstone explained that either a zipgun or a pistol with a silencer must have been used, but I was sure no one could have reached behind Devane's head without my seeing him. Then I realized who the killer was.

"The coughing man," I said.

"Who's he?" asked Featherstone.

"The only person who stepped between Devane and me during the first act. He's the only person who could have done it," I said, then related the little I had noticed of the man. "But I do remember that his loudest cough was as he stepped in front of me. His hands were hidden, I think he was holding his

overcoat in front of him."

"And under that was the gun," said Featherstone. "My guess is that the shot went in just where he wanted—three or four inches above the collar. The killer needs a minute to get out of the building—if there's a lot of blood, he gets caught. So he aims for the brain stem because a bullet there shuts down the whole body and the only bleeding would be from the scalp. If he uses a small-caliber gun, the entrance hole is small and there's no exit wound. The killer thought everything out. We can find out what seat he was in and whether anyone remembers what he looked like, but that won't help us."

"In other words," I said, "we are going to find that the ticket was paid for in cash and that he arrived just after the lights went down. And if he wore a fake beard or mustache, that's the only feature anyone will remember."

Featherstone gave a discouraged nod.

"In answer to your question 'Why here?' I'd say the purpose was to make a point—in a very public way."

"Seems so," said Featherstone. "But who is the lesson meant for?"

Neither of us had an answer. He wrote a few more notes and I could see he had run out of questions for me. After taking

down my home telephone number, he gave me permission to leave, then stopped me.

"You seem a little dispassionate about all this," Featherstone observed.

"My first newspaper job was working the police beat," I said. "I know this will all get to me later, when I start thinking about it. I'm trying not to—until I'm alone. Make sense?" I asked.

The lieutenant said it did and turned away.

Two minutes later I was back on the orchestra pit telephone.

"Any problems, Frank?"

"Nope, great shape. Each of the television stations quoted our story, and Jimmy got a good photo of Devane being wheeled through the lobby, past a lot of rich types. Rachel interviewed about a dozen people from the audience and got two actors as they came out the stage door. Both wire services picked up our story, giving us full credit, and the new publisher saw it on TV in Chicago. He called with congratulations."

I took no pleasure in the compliments. I just said, "Good, glad they're using our name," and asked for someone who could type fast and spell correctly. A woman came on the line, said she had read everything I sent in before and was ready for the add. I dictated another six hundred words for the bottom of the main story, then

gave her five hundred words for a sidebar about Devane's life. I didn't need any notes. She spelled back all the names and checked the times and numbers before we hung up.

Once before I had to tell a wife she was a widow. I remember the hateful duty exactly. The second time was no easier. A nurse always sat with Virginia when Devane was away, and I motioned for her to leave the room. As the door closed, Virginia said, "Richard's not alive, is he?" Her voice was slow and matter-of-fact.

"Did you hear it on TV or did someone call?"

"Neither," she said. "From the first year we were together, I could always feel Richard's moods, even when we were apart. There was always a presence I could feel and read. A few hours ago, when I woke up," her voice began to break, "I couldn't feel him there any more. He was gone."

She closed her eyes and was silent for more than five minutes.

"Life isn't very forgiving, is it," she said. It wasn't a question.

"No," I agreed, aware that I didn't fully understand her meaning. "Basically, it's cruel."

"You can't make any mistakes," she said softly, her eyes

still closed, but their lashes wet. "My mistake was one of judgment, Richard's mistake was one of faith." She lay still, but her right hand was clenched in a small fist so tight the knuckles were a row of white mounds.

"Come back tomorrow morning," she said.

"I will," I promised, and as I left I heard her slight exhalation and the single word "Damn."

I slept for four hours that night. Only my body seemed to shut down, to get the rest it needed. I woke up fully alert at six A.M. and that's when the loss of Richard Devane hit me. Men of principle are hard to find, and my friend with the small round hole in the back of his head had been one of them. I know that grief is a self-centered emotion, that only the living can regret their losses. For the dead, well, maybe it's better for someone like Devane if there is nothing on the other side; then he would never know he had been robbed of his life. Neither life nor death was fair.

Fair. And yet Virginia, by saying Richard had paid, was implying there was a balance sheet—an unforgiving ledger kept somewhere. Devane had done something wrong, and Virginia knew what it was.

I do not remember getting up, showering, or eating. These are

the times when habits are helpful, when the hands, arms, and legs do their appointed tasks without request while the mind works on, apart and distant.

I could not guess what mistake Devane's death answered for. His values, in life and work, had been the highest. Wealth had no allure for him. The man who said the word "theater" with the reverence that others reserved for the word "church" had already attained the status and position he most wanted. As a critic, Devane's standards were impeccable. Repeatedly he had told me I must adhere to what I thought was right. "Keep the standard fair and high and they'll respect you," he said. "If you want to be loved, find another job.

"The shows will come and go, but you and the standards remain. If you send the public to wretched productions or keep them from the great ones, you deserve to lose your seat on the aisle," he had told me. "You must be a fair Roman: Thumbs up and the show should live, thumbs down and it deserves to die."

At ten o'clock I was standing next to Virginia's bed. She was dozing, and I softly called her name. Her face twitched, then lost its concentration as she came out of her dream. She opened her eyes and bleakly

tried to focus on me.

"I was dreaming of my honeymoon with Richard," she said slowly, her voice still mired in sleep. "I was young again, re-living everything, but I knew how Richard was going to die. I wanted to tell him, so he could avoid it, but I couldn't say the words."

She paused and I stayed silent.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I guess I'm not making much sense." She pushed herself up into a half-sitting position and I saw she had put on one of Devane's old button-down shirts.

"I'll try to explain, but it's hard to put into words. I never would have told anyone if it hadn't finally killed Richard. Four years ago is when it started, when I first became sick." She stopped for a moment to compose herself, then continued.

"Richard and I never could have children. Somehow, that pulled us closer together, rather than pushing us apart like it does to most couples. We developed that special sense of being a twosome. Richard was the kindest of men and he trusted me completely. He had a need to trust, to believe absolutely in someone, and I was lucky enough to be that someone.

"Richard never told you about his life when he was growing up, about what happened to his

parents. His father left Richard and his mother when he was only seven—one afternoon his father went to the store and never came home. Two years later, his mother abandoned him. She took a few things but left no note. Richard waited in that apartment at the age of nine for two weeks, waited for his mother to come home. She never did.

"There was no other family. A neighbor with three children took him in. I believe they loved him like one of their own, but the damage had been done. To Richard's mind, it was his fault that his parents left. He felt that their leaving somehow meant he wasn't good enough. About twenty years ago, I met the woman who took him in, and she said it broke her heart that Richard always expected his second family to leave him, too. She said that some days, when he came home from school, he looked almost surprised to see she was still there. He never got his hopes up and he tried to protect himself by always being prepared for the worst."

Virginia stopped to get her breath again, then continued.

"He immersed himself in books—his own emotions were safe when he was in someone else's make-believe world. I always thought he loved the theater because it was the closest thing to life where he could still

be safe, where no part of him was at stake.

"When I started to feel sick, I didn't want to worry Richard, and I didn't tell him about the tests and the doctors' appointments. That was my mistake in judgment. And I didn't realize I was becoming distant and preoccupied with the medical problems. For one test, I had to stay overnight at the hospital. I scheduled it for a night Richard would be in New York. I waited until after his usual evening call, at about six o'clock, then I went to the hospital.

"Much later, I learned that he had called the house at ten o'clock and then every hour after that until four A.M. The next day, when he got back, he didn't tell me he had tried to call again, just asked what I had done that night, and I said I'd stayed home. Richard had noticed all my silences, felt my distance from him, and with that last lie, he concluded I was having an affair. Emotionally, I think he always expected it. He was braced for it because that would be the first step for the final abandoning—by me."

The talking was visibly tiring her and she stopped to sip from the water glass on the bedside table before proceeding.

"Richard's self-defense was to find someone else, another woman, so that when I left him he wouldn't be alone again. The

woman was in her early forties, not part of the theater world, and very discreet. There was no scandal though it lasted several months.

"One night, I blacked out and Richard took me to the hospital. There he learned how long I had been sick. My doctor said that Richard turned a terrible white and began to shake, for he realized what had happened and what he had done. He refused to leave my hospital room, he was there when I woke up and every day after. I remember him sitting next to the bed, not saying a word, tears running down his face. Not until three years later did I know he was crying for his lack of trust, his lack of faith in me.

"He didn't tell me about the affair, not even when the other woman's maid saw the chance to make some fast money. Her brother was a stagehand and he went to the Garrios. They paid the maid ten thousand dollars for a written statement, including dates and times; about Richard's affair. They knew I was sick, and that's when they began to blackmail Richard. What they wanted were good reviews for their shows."

I had never heard of its being done, but it was so logical it seemed inevitable. At least a half million dollars was needed to mount even an average sized production. Paying salaries of

cast and crew; renting a theater, costumes and props; hiring an orchestra if necessary; and buying the rights to a property or an option amounted to an expensive gamble on the critical tastebuds of a few men making reporters' salaries. If the praise of the most important man was assured, then it was no gamble at all—and better than a million-dollar ad campaign.

Virginia continued, "Richard decided he would compromise all his standards as a critic rather than let me know about the affair. He wrote four reviews he didn't believe in, and I knew it each time. The Garrios covered themselves by using front men as the producers on three of the four shows so they wouldn't be the common link between the inconsistent reviews. Two shows were comedies, two were musicals, and Richard was depressed for nearly a week after writing each false review.

"A year ago, I begged him to tell me what was going on, and he finally told me everything. It was hard, thinking of him with another woman, but I understood, and after a time the hurt was less. The other result was that it ended the Garrios' hold on him. For the past year he had looked forward to this show because the Garrios had invested so heavily in it.

They were relying on the ticket sales that Richard's review would generate. He waited until two days before the opening; then he told them they didn't own him any more."

"In just two days, the Garrios decided to hire a killer and go from blackmail to murder," I said.

"When you came back from the opening, instead of Richard, I knew what had happened, and why," she said. "And the Garrios have gotten away with it. A killer like that is untraceable, and he is the only tie between the Garrios and what happened to Richard. And that means they're safe."

We talked for nearly two hours more. She wanted no words of comfort, I didn't offer any. We talked about Devane, about the quality of his work, and even laughed again at things he had done or said.

It was a wake for a party of two.

Driving from the house, I thought how the Garrios had misjudged Devane. They had killed him to keep him quiet, but he never would have gone public with a story about the blackmail—the personal shame would have been too great.

I stopped at a pay phone and called the office. I asked the top business writer to gather what

he could about the Garrios from safe sources, people who wouldn't pass along the fact that questions were being asked. My second call was to Featherstone, but I was told he was out, possibly at the Barrymore. For several minutes I considered going there but decided to try a long shot, to give a tug on one of the few threads leading into the Garrios' world. The phone directory was ripped and water-curved, the page I wanted was missing, but information had the number.

The telephone line changed its hum three times before ringing on the other end. The receiver was picked up and I heard the sound of a vacuum's dying roar before I heard a voice.

"Hello, this is Miss Harling's house," said a woman with an Asian accent.

"Is Miss Harling there?" I asked.

"I am sorry, sir," she said, articulating each word. "She has gone to Detroit for the day. She will be home tonight."

I thought for a moment, then asked, "Do you know what time her plane left?"

"Yes, sir. She said it would be at about one o'clock."

My watch showed twelve twenty-five.

"Did she mention what airline?"

"Yes, sir, but I do not remem-

ber the name. I think it is the one with the rhyme, the one that says, 'We bring Chicago to you and Detroit too.' "

I thanked her and hung up.

Twenty minutes later, I was running through the door of the airline terminal. On the overhead TV screen, "Final Call" blinked next to the twelve fifty-five to Chicago and Detroit. I took the stairs two at a time and hoped my story would get me past the guards at the "Passengers Must Show Ticket" sign. As I came up to the glass partition, I saw Lea Harling step from the waiting area onto the gangway leading to the plane. It would do no good now to claim she was my wife and had both our tickets.

I sprinted back down the stairs to the ticket counters and found an agent just opening a window. I bought a round-trip ticket for the flight and within four minutes was back up the stairs, past the guards and metal detector, and was the last passenger to board the plane. As I stepped into the cabin, I saw Lea Harling sitting alone. The sunlight from the window she was gazing out made her blonde hair glow as if it had a light of its own. I sat down next to her and was putting on my seat belt when she turned to look at me. Where she had expected to find a stranger was instead a familiar face, though it took her a

few moments to place it.

"You're the other critic," she said. "I remember you." She paused while her mind kept working. "And you're the one who wrote the stories about Devane in today's paper."

The first half-hour of our flight to Chicago was spent talking about the murder, and then I moved the conversation where I wanted it.

"Where are you going to?"

"Back to Boston, really. This plane makes two stops and then turns around and heads back. I've delivering a script for the Garrios," she touched a corner of the large brown envelope in her lap. "There is this writer in Detroit, I never heard of him, but he has to read this tonight. The Garrios are deciding whether to produce the show, and their option on it expires tomorrow."

I thought that someone had taken the time to prepare a plausible story for the innocent messenger.

We talked about the Garrios' shows, their successes, and how they had stayed with light entertainment, avoiding the heavy dramas. Financially, revivals, musicals, and comedies were the best bets, she said.

"Isn't that what you were best at, Lea? Comedy?"

"You remember!" she said happily. "It's been five years since I was on a stage, and I

think that's about fifty years in show business time. I haven't been in a show since I did that revival of *Boy Crazy*.

"I got all good reviews and a great one. I had two songs, one was just for laughs but I could pull it off and the other was a slow, sad ballad. Some people were surprised I had the voice for it, but I do. One night I knew I did it just right, before the right kind of audience. I finished it and walked off and no one clapped. I know it sounds strange, and it scared me at first, because I thought no one liked it. Then they began to applaud, louder and louder, until I had to go back out and take a bow because they wouldn't let the show go on. You see," she said, "nobody clapped because they didn't want to break the spell of the song. That's the best it ever was for me."

She closed her eyes and leaned back in her seat, feeling again her glorious moment.

"Why was that your last show?" I asked.

"I don't know," she said, her eyes opening with a troubled look. "I've thought about it a lot. I guess people just have streaks of bad luck in life. For two years I got turned down for parts. After that, people just forgot about me. I wasn't even called for readings any more."

"Did you ever wonder if you'd been blacklisted?"

"That's just what it seemed like," she said, "but I didn't have any enemies. I'd never had any fights with anyone."

"What do you think about the idea you were blacklisted—not because someone hated you but because they liked you?"

She was quiet for a few moments before slowly saying, "I don't understand."

"Have you ever thought that the people who blacklisted you were the Garrios?"

Her look was incredulous and the meaning of my words silenced her. She looked out the window and, while combing through the past five years, thought of evidence to fit the new idea. The bright sunlight at thirty thousand feet showed the small lines that age had brought to her eyes and mouth.

"I don't want to believe it," she said. "I can't believe they . . . that they would take that away from me. But it fits. They always say they get what they want. I guess I'm no different from anything else."

"Who else could tell me that's what happened?" she asked.

"Who are the critics around the country you respect the most?"

"In New York there are Dorrance and Briggs, and Ramos in L.A."

I pulled a small address book out of my jacket pocket and said, "We have thirty minutes

during the stopover in Chicago. Pick a name and we'll call him."

After a rough landing, we walked off the plane together, Lea still carrying the brown envelope. At a nearby bank of telephones, she took the address book out of my hands and studied Dorrance's number. She watched as I punched it in, then added my calling card number. I was relieved to hear Dorrance's voice. I told him I was with Lea and that she wanted to confirm my story about what ended her career. I handed her the receiver. She said hello, listened for several minutes, and the pain in her face gave way to a hard anger. She said, "Thank you," hung up, and then surprised me.

"Our meeting on the plane wasn't by chance, was it?"

"No, not at all," I admitted.

"Then you must want this," she replied, handing me the brown envelope. "It must be quite a script."

"It's no script."

She pulled the envelope back and ripped it open. Her expression told me I had guessed right. "This is all money," she said in disbelief. "It's all hundred-dollar bills."

A lot of new ideas had hit her in the last hour, and she was having trouble adapting to them all. She stared into the envelope, bewildered.

"You need to deliver it," I told

her. "Take the money to the man you're supposed to meet. But this is your chance to get back at the Garrios."

She looked up at me and cocked her head to the side. "Will it be worth five years?"

"It might be worth even more," I replied, and asked her for the envelope.

She handed it to me without a word. Before we reboarded, I bought an identical envelope and a notepad at the airport gift shop.

Lea didn't talk during the short hop to Detroit. Oblivious to me and everything else, she stared dully out the window into the darkening sky. I prepared the new envelope and wrote a single sentence on a sheet of notepaper.

I tried to coach Lea a little, to get her out of the robot-like trance she was caught in. I made her realize she had to play the role of dutiful messenger, and she nodded her understanding. She had to make the delivery alone because I might be recognized by the coughing man. The killer would have looked down the aisle to see who sat behind Devane. My plan was based on an assumption: any doubts would kill it, along with Lea and me.

She walked off the plane in Detroit carrying the envelope in both hands and returned within five minutes. A white

man of "average height with an average-looking face" waved to her, took the envelope out of her hands, and walked away. Whether it was the killer or someone else made no difference.

As the plane pulled out of the gate and taxied to the runway, Lea asked, "How dangerous was what I just did?"

"Very, if I guessed wrong. If I guessed right, it will be the best thing you ever did."

"That payoff," she said, "was it for the man who shot Devane?"

I nodded. "I can almost guarantee it. The killer is the kind who only works away from his home city, who flies in, does the job, and leaves. The very good ones, like this one must be, set their own prices and their own conditions. For example, a hand-carried cash payment the next day."

"Do they care who they kill?"

"Most of them don't, though I've heard of a few who won't take a job if a child is the target. The important thing is the pride in being a real pro, never making mistakes and planning every detail. Every clean job adds to the reputation, which adds to the price. The client gets full value for his money."

"And," I said, "he is not the kind of person who would want a messenger to talk about her trip."

"It could be fatal?" she asked.

"If he ever thinks you were anything but a good little errand girl, we can write your obit now. And mine, too, because before he killed you, he would ask a lot of questions in a very forceful way."

She nodded and was quiet for most of the trip back to Boston.

As the plane began its descent, I asked if anyone was likely to meet her at the airport.

"Maybe," she answered. "The Garrios are unpredictable. I'm supposed to call in and tell them I'm back."

"Good, do that, but stay away from them for the next week or so," I said. "If you have a good friend somewhere, out of New England, now's the time to pay a visit. In case anyone is here to meet you, get off early and walk away from the gate. I'll try to be the last one off."

As the plane pulled to a stop, Lea gave me the name of a friend on Long Island she might stay with. She stood up and slipped down the aisle without saying goodbye, but just before she moved out of sight, she looked over her shoulder and gave me a smile with only a hint of the actress in it.

Devane's funeral the following day became a media event because of the celebrities in attendance. Some came because

of their feelings for Devane, others for their love of free publicity. There were some great performances on the church steps. Virginia avoided the circus and the cameras. She was wheeled into the church through a side door after everyone was seated and left the moment the eulogy was over. The burial was private. Virginia stayed in the car parked on a side road thirty feet away.

For the next two days there was no news on the murder, and the daily "police are continuing their investigation" stories were shorter and moved deeper into the paper. A special matinee of *Hope for Love* was given for the opening-night crowd and the critics. Every review was a hatchet job.

One night later, I got the telephone call I was hoping for. At two A.M. I was asleep but picked up the receiver after the first ring.

"Stephens?" said the familiar voice.

"Hi, Frank. What's happened?"

"The Garrios aren't being original, but they are big news. A half hour ago they were found downtown in their office, each with a bullet in the back of the head."

"Any sign of their being tortured?" I asked.

Frank's hesitation reflected

his surprise at my question.

"No, the guy we've got over there said they were each sitting at a desk, wearing an expensive suit. No sign of a struggle, their hands weren't tied."

"No clues?"

"One, but it was intentional so it's no clue at all."

"What was it?"

Frank read me the note.

"I don't know what it means," I lied. "Do you need any background on the Garrios?"

"No, we looked in your files and took out the clips you had on them. I'll make sure the folder's put back."

"I appreciate the call," I said and hung up.

Forty minutes later, I was standing next to Virginia's bed. The night nurse had been sent downstairs.

"The Garrios had a visitor tonight," I began and told her most of what Frank had said.

"And what do you know about it?" she asked, watching my face.

I told her about my trip to Chicago and Detroit, Lea's call to Dorrance, and the delivery of the envelope.

"How much was Richard's life worth?"

"Sixty thousand dollars was the price."

"What was it you did with the envelope?"

"I took out forty thousand

and added a short note from the Garrios."

"Which said . . ."

"Just the words, 'We have decided this is what the job was worth.'"

"I don't think the man in Detroit would have liked that," she said softly.

"No," I agreed. "He couldn't let anyone short him like that. I bet that it would be a matter of pride and reputation. If word got out, other customers would do the same thing. My worry was that the killer might have had some doubts about the note's being from the Garrios. Then he would have interrogated them first. But they had a reputation for arrogance, so it fit that they would try something like that. No interrogation means that Mr. Detroit didn't suspect Lea. I made sure she was away from the Garrios when the killer came back. If she had been around, he would probably have killed her too, just to be thorough. And he left a note, so I'm sure he won't go after her."

"Or you," Virginia said.

"Or me," I agreed. "But I knew the risk. Lea was just a pawn. I didn't tell her beforehand because I didn't want her to look nervous and give anything away when she delivered the money. She's an actress, but acting for your life is too hard for anyone."

"I think I know now why Richard's death was done so publicly, so obviously that it would be big news. That was the purpose—for two reasons. First, think of the public as having a complex personality. The same people who give money for earthquake victims or to end a famine can yell 'Jump!' or 'Coward!' to a man standing on a building ledge. The Garrios knew how to market a show, and murder was their ultimate gimmick."

"They killed Richard just to have a hit?" Virginia asked, her voice shaking.

"No, I think he was going to be killed anyway. But the right circumstances would be worth millions to the Garrios, and they were right. Despite all the reviews, *Hope for Love* is a sell-out for the next four weeks here, and the advance sale in New York is two million dollars—every ticket going to someone who wants to see the show a critic was murdered at."

"God, it's ghoulish," she said.

"Yes, it is. And the irony is that the Garrios' murders will hype the sales even more."

Virginia was quiet for a while before asking, "And the second reason for its being done at the theater?"

"I'm not sure, but I'll bet Richard wasn't the only critic the Garrios had a hold on. If that's true, his murder was the

best-possible threat to keep all the other critics in line. By proving they were willing to kill, the Garrios could prevent any revolt. When Richard was killed, those critics would have guessed what happened. Now that the Garrios are dead, the same critics are breathing a lot easier."

"What about the evidence the Garrios used to blackmail each of them? Someone else could start using it."

"I called Featherstone. He said he'll look for whatever photos or letters the Garrios might have been holding. There's a safe in the Garrios' office, and Featherstone will be there when

the police open it tomorrow. He'll personally mail the evidence back to each critic. For Lea, I'll send her the forty thousand, spread out over two years. It will be money to live on while she rebuilds her career. I'll do it anonymously, with a warning to keep quiet about the money, but I think she'll eventually figure out where it came from."

"And the note the killer left at the Garrios', what did it say?"

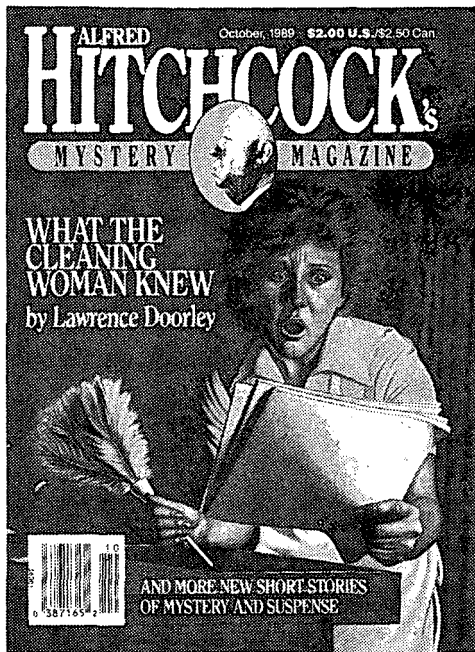
"Simply, 'Paid in full.'"

Virginia nodded slowly, then said, "By everyone."

She was crying as I left the room.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685) 1. Title of Publication: Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine. Publication No. 00025224. 2. Date of Filing: October 1, 1989. 3. Frequency of issue: Every 28 Days; (A) No. of Issues Published Annually: 13; (B) Annual Subscription Price: \$25.97. 4. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. 5. Complete Mailing Address of the Headquarters or General Business Office of the Publishers (not Printers): 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. 6. Names and Addresses of Publisher, Editor and Managing Editor: President: Joel Davis, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Editor: Cathleen Jordan, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Managing Editor: Holly Wallinger, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. 7. Owner: Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Davis Communications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Joel Davis, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. 8. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities: NONE. 10. Extent and Nature of Circulation: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months (A) Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run): 338,323; (B) Paid Circulation: (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, and Counter Sales: 21,908; (2) Mail Subscriptions: 234,994; (C) Total Paid Circulation: 256,901; (D) Free Distribution by Mail, Carrier or Other Means Samples, Complimentary and Other Free Copies: 920; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 257,821; (F) Copies Not Distributed: (1) Office Use, Left Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing: 5,141; (2) Returns from News Agents: 75,361; (G) Total (Sum of E and F—should equal net press run shown in A): 338,323. Actual Number Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: (A) Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run): 338,481; (B) Paid Circulation: (1) Sales through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales: 23,000; (2) Mail Subscriptions: 236,139; (C) Total Paid Circulation: 259,139; (D) Free Distribution by Mail Carriers or Other Means Samples, Complimentary and Other Free Copies: 906; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 260,045; (F) Copies Not Distributed: (1) Office Use, Left Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing: 7,076; (2) Returns from News Agents: 71,360; (G) Total (Sum of E and F—should equal net press run shown in A): 338,481. I certify that the statements made by me are correct and complete.

ELIZABETH BEATTY
SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER



SOME PEOPLE WOULD KILL

FOR A COPY.

**SUBSCRIBE NOW AND SAVE UP TO
25% OFF THE COVER PRICE**

CALL TOLL-FREE 1-800-333-3311

YES SEND ME 12 ISSUES
FOR ONLY \$17.97

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____



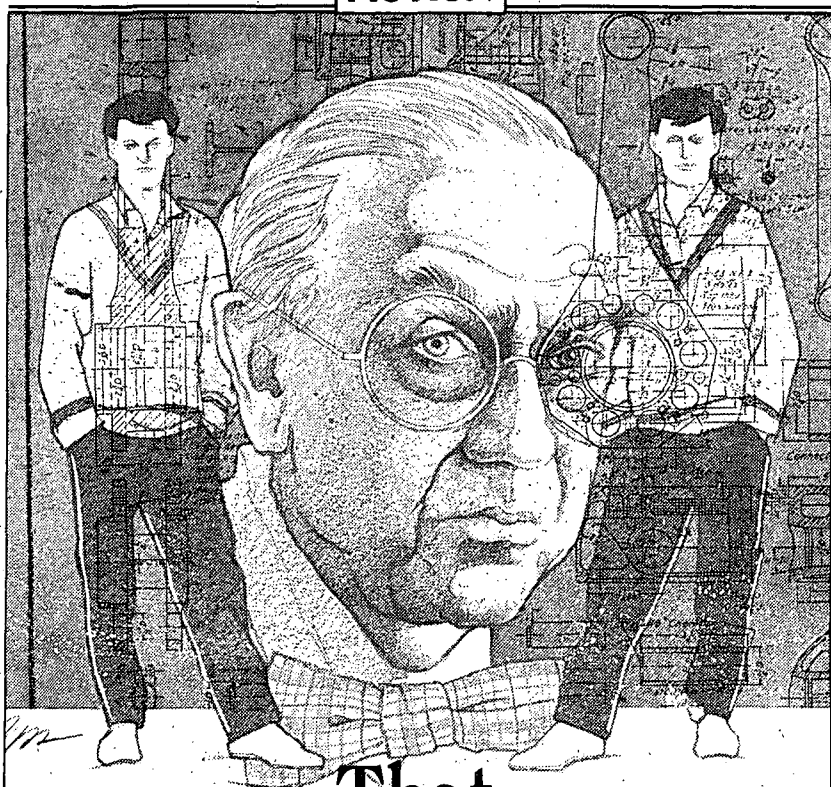
P.O. Box 7055 Red Oak, Iowa 51591

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery
of first issue. Outside U.S. and possessions
\$21.97 for 12 issues. All foreign orders
must be paid in advance in U.S. currency.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HCSC-8

FICTION



That Intangible Something

by Geoffrey Hitchcock

“So that’s your dream house.”
“That’s the one.”

Ed’s matter-of-fact tone failed to hide his eagerness. “What do you think? Remember, it’s not for entertaining or luxury liv-

ing—it’s for setting up a lab where I can potter without interruptions.”

I looked at the house with a somewhat jaundiced eye. I was hot. The desert sun was trying to boil out my brain. I was hun-

gry and not in the best of moods. I'd stopped off in San Diego on my way to a teaching conference in San Francisco, to visit my old professor and friend Ed Blomfield, who, instead of taking me home for a cool beer and lunch with his charming wife, had whisked me off to see this damned house. Just a short run into the country, he said. Short run, my ass! Three hours along highways and byways and finally over the godawfullest track in the godawfullest state of repair. And the air conditioning not working properly.

Ed had been too excited to notice the heat and discomfort and had chatted away about a genetic engineering project he was engaged on. A mass transfer system he called it—a machine that could select a single molecule of, say, an amino acid and place it at a specified point on a DNA chain.

"The mind boggles," I'd said.

"Perhaps yours boggles too easily, Robert," he'd replied.

"Perhaps it does. The thought of those tiny men pushing their minute wheelbarrows full of assorted amino acids and selecting one particular molecule and sticking it on a DNA chain with microscopic forceps and a minuscule dab of glue. Yes, it boggles all right!"

"Looking at it that way, it would—" the concept amused him—"but we're a long way out

of the steam age now and deep into the electronic."

We were quiet then for a while as his mind no doubt wandered along a maze of circuitry and mathematical symbols and I kept an eye on the road just in case. Then he spoke again.

"Do you remember the pile of old sf magazines we found in the attic of that house near Pasadena?"

"From back in the eighties? Yes, I do. It was fascinating to find how relevant some of the stories still were after fifty years or so."

"Do you remember the one about a man who made a copying machine?"

"Vaguely—fill me in—what did he copy?"

"Well, to begin with he copied banknotes—that paper money they had in those days. Then solid things like dishes and fabrics. And then he copied his dog."

"Ah yes, it comes back to me. Didn't the two dogs fight each other to the death? But in spite of that he couldn't resist copying himself?"

"That's right, it seemed logical to copy his undoubted genius—two good things are better than one—but the copy was so perfect it wanted to be the boss. So the two set out to destroy each other."

"And succeeded, if I remem-

ber it right. Quite a good yarn, but the idea of making a life's work out of copying things didn't appeal to me."

"All the same—" and there was a wistful note in his voice—"what wouldn't I give to know how he did it."

It seemed to me an extraordinary thing to say. "Ed," I said, "he didn't do it. It was only a story." He sighed just the way he used to do when he was tutoring me and I couldn't grasp some concept that seemed obvious to him.

Ours is a strange friendship. He's a really brilliant biophysicist, and I'm a rather down-to-earth schoolteacher, but somehow we click. I guess I need him to raise me out of the mire and perhaps he needs me to keep his feet somewhere near the ground.

I looked hard at the house while Ed waited impatiently for my reply. Built of native stone, it could have been beautiful, but it was just a big oblong box two stories high with narrow windows and two steps leading to a plain oak entrance door. The roof that might have redeemed it was corrugated iron.

"It looks practical." That was the kindest thing I could think of to say. It stood between low hills that looked like piles of rubble. "And it's well out of the way of vandals, so it should be okay even if it has stood empty for years. Let's look inside."

A few squirts of oil from a can Ed had thought to bring and the key turned. We wandered from room to room. There was no mold or rot, just spider webs by the million. The place only needed a good cleanup and the plumbing and wiring checked out—nothing to frighten a man with Ed's bank balance.

I looked out of the windows at the barren, bouldery hills. Who in God's name would build a house here? Even for a rich family with some cupboard skeleton to hide, it seemed a bit harsh. Not even a crazy geologist would want to live here. No wonder Ed could get it for a song. I wouldn't have given a croak myself, but then I wasn't planning to interfere with the natural order of things. An order that seemed good—or bad—enough as it was. Not Ed's view, of course.

"Just the thing for a mad scientist recluse," I joked. "Four big bedrooms and two bathrooms upstairs and two huge living rooms downstairs plus large kitchen, pantries, breakfast room, and what have you. What more could you possibly want?"

"Where do you think the entrance to the basement might be?" he asked.

Some people are never satisfied. "I shouldn't think a house like this would have a basement, there's no need for one."

And one hell of a job to dig it."

He seemed disappointed. "Let's look at the outbuildings," he said.

Outside, at the back of the house, was a low building consisting of a double garage, workshop-cum-toolroom, and a small flat—probably servants' quarters. Separate from that was a shed that housed a fifty kilowatt diesel generator set.

"That'll need a good overhaul," I said. "Maybe you'll need to replace it."

Ed nodded. "I wonder where the water comes from."

"I was wondering that, too. I think there must be a tapping off one of the pipelines to the city that may run near here. There was water in the faucets, remember?"

But his mind was off on some other track. "I suppose there could be a well in the basement," he said.

"If there was a well, the water would have to be pumped, and the taps would be dry. Ed, why are you so obsessed with a basement? Surely you'll have all the space you need for your transfer experiments?"

He gave me a funny look. "Come, I want to show you something."

He led me to the east side of the house where there had once been flowerbeds outlined with stones. He pushed aside a dead bush and revealed what were

clearly two small graves. On each of them, written in white pebbles pressed firmly into the hard ground, were the words BRUNO 11/6/2024." I stood silent, feeling Ed's eyes on me. The sun dipped behind a hill and I shivered.

"We'd better be getting back," Ed said. "You must be starving."

It wasn't until we'd found an eating place some way back along the highway and had stoked up with hot coffee and doughnuts that the party began to come to life again. We talked about what needed to be done to the house and its merits and demerits as a secret lab. Then Ed said, "There's something I didn't tell you. I know the name of the owner of the house—one Samuel Carraday, only son of Joseph Carraday, millionaire plus. I only had to look for a coroner's report for somewhere in 2024 or 2025. I found it. On the evening of the 23rd of May, 2025, one Hec Dinsdale and his wife Bernice, on the way to visit friends, mistook the turning—by miles as it turned out—and found themselves in unfamiliar territory. Reasoning that it would be better to seek advice than to go back to the highway, they drove on and came to this house. It was in darkness, and no one responded to Hec's knock. Walking around to see if there was anyone out back, Hec

stumbled over the body of a man. Not a recent corpse, he reported, judging from the smell." I knew I didn't want to hear the rest but Ed went on. "The sheriff's men found not one body but two. Probably been dead about two weeks. Both had been nibbled by rodents and torn by birds. Both dead from a single bullet. It appeared to the investigators that the two men had been stalking each other along two sides of the house, had met at the corner and fired simultaneously. The bodies were never identified positively. It was assumed that one was Sam Carraday and the other was some intruder who had stolen one of Sam's suits."

"Why did they assume that?" I asked and wished I hadn't.

"Because their clothes were identical in all respects. And incidentally, the guns that were found by the bodies were both old fashioned Colt six-shooters circa 1880—collector's items."

"Very strange," was all I could think of to say.

"Yes, very strange." Did I detect a hint of sarcasm? I had to get him off this line of thought.

"Given time," I said, "I'm sure I could find a plausible explanation."

"Oh, there've been lots of those already. Very plausible."

"Come off it, Ed. You've got obsessed with this idea, but

damn it, man, it was only a story—it didn't really happen. Why don't you forget it and get on with your mass transfer gadget?"

"Oh, I'm going to do that, but first I must find out if it's still in the basement. It might give me some leads I need."

"The basement in the story with the copying machine in it?"

"Robert," he said as if speaking to a dull child again, "the story was written about 1980. The twinlike bodies were found in May, 2025, so it's not the story that's intriguing me. It did at the time I read it, and it may very well have intrigued thousands of others. Suppose one of them was a very wealthy young man of about twenty just deciding what to do with his life. Suppose he was a brilliant and inventive science student. Suppose his name was—Sam Carraday." I had nothing to say, so Ed continued. "Suppose you and I go out again tomorrow and look for that basement?"

"I'm sorry, Ed, I have to catch a plane at seven thirty tomorrow morning or I'll miss the first day of the conference. And besides, I don't think I want to have anything to do with this project."

"Why not? Don't you see any value in it?"

"No, I see no point in copying

things. Common things are churned out by factories. Rare things owe their charm to their rarity."

"What about, say, rare birds—endangered species?"

"That'd be fine, but you'd be wasting your time trying to copy living things."

"What about the dog and the man?"

"Just a tale—oh, you mean out there? Come off it, Ed, of all the explanations the one about copies destroying each other must be the least likely."

"You think so?"

"Far be it from me to argue with my old prof, but surely the difference between the living and the non-living is something—something inexplicable. Not something material that just conceivably could be copied or built up."

Ed grinned. "Many inexplicable phenomena have been explained before now," he said.

I gave up.

The cards that fate dealt me kept me away from Ed for more than six years. We kept in touch, of course, brief letters getting less and less frequent. At first, great excitement—he'd found the basement. It was under the house all right; the entrance was through a trap in the cupboard under the stairs, but it was electrically operated so he'd

had to get the power in order. It was very big, and it contained a strange machine that he couldn't quite comprehend. He'd also discovered about two thousand pages of notes that he was studying. . . . His daughter had married and gone to live in Tulsa. . . . His wife had got fed up with the hours he spent away from home and gone to live in Tulsa, too. . . . He'd resigned from the university and moved out to the house. . . . He was employing a man to look after him so that he could spend more time in the lab.

That was something of a relief. I had been worrying about my friend, obsessed as he was, out there alone and probably not eating properly. After that, his correspondence dried up, although I wrote several times. I wanted to go out there and see for myself what was going on, but with the commitments I had, it just wasn't possible. Then fate dealt me a new hand. I got a school at Laguna Beach and we had just moved into our new house when a letter came that was practically a presidential summons. I packed a weekend bag and drove off.

The door was opened by a swarthy middle-aged man who might well have been an illegal immigrant from over the border. He looked me up and down. "You Davenport?" he asked.

"Yes.—Robert Davenport."

"Okay. Come in."

We went into one of the big ground floor rooms now furnished with a few rugs, arm-chairs, and occasional tables.

"I'm Costello," he said. "The boss is downstairs. He shouldn't be long, though you can never tell with him. Coffee?"

"Please." I wondered if it would be drinkable.

It was—it was excellent, as were the cakes that Costello admitted he'd made himself.

"Where'd you learn to bake like that?"

He stiffened, then relaxed and grinned. "Let's just say, shall we, that a guy picks things up as he goes through life?"

I began to warm to the man.

Ed was some time coming. I got up and wandered about the room. On one of the small tables was an elegant Chinese dish. I picked it up and examined it closely. It was slightly marred by a fine hairline crack that ran from rim to center. Pity. On another of the tables was another Chinese dish. I picked it up and examined it closely. It was slightly marred by a fine hairline crack that ran from rim to center . . . through the identical portion of the pattern as the other one. I put it down quickly. Suddenly it seemed to me that I was seeing double. Every item in the room—chairs, tables, rugs, vases—had its twin. I felt sick.

I looked up to see Ed in the doorway grinning hugely. "Seeing double?" he asked. Then he came forward and grabbed my hand. "Gosh, it's good to see you again, Rob. I sure could have used your help at times."

He did seem genuinely glad to see me. I held onto his hand and looked at him. He was bubbling over with enthusiasm but at the same time looked old and worn out. My heart went out to him and I grasped his hand more firmly, but what could I say?

"It seems you've managed very well without me," I said, waving my arm in a gesture encompassing the room, "but I wish you'd had some help—you've worn yourself out."

"Not quite yet, not quite yet. But you would have slowed me down, steadied me."

"I'd have slowed you down all right—I'd've smashed the damn thing!"

"No, you wouldn't, it's too beautiful. You'd have been as enraptured as I was. Remember all those tiny men with their wheelbarrows running off to fetch an atom of this and a barrow load of that and carefully building according to the plan?" He laughed happily. "Come and see."

The lab, as he called it, was huge. It must have been the whole area of the ground plan of the house. It was filled with

what I suppose you would call machinery. But there was nothing spectacular, weird, or Frankensteinish about it. No coils, no sparks. Just a collection of plastic-covered modules of various shapes and sizes all scrupulously clean and polished. There was no noise apart from a quiet hum probably from cooling fans.

The modules were arranged in tiers around three walls of the lab but spaced away from them. On the fourth wall, at the end of the U, were two box-like objects about two and a half meters long and one and a half wide and deep. These, Ed told me, were the containers—one held the object to be copied and the other the copy. Between the containers was a large control console complete with readout screen, keyboard, indicator lights, knobs, switches, and meters. Behind it were more modules that Ed said contained the computers and power equipment. Two tall modules contained electron microscopes so that the little men, Ed mocked, could see what they were doing. Let him have his fun, I thought, let him exult in his toy. These modules held the scanners, those the selectors. Most of the modules round the walls held the basic materials—the building blocks. And there were the filing cabinets that held the key to it all.

In spite of a gut feeling that it was all wrong, I couldn't help being awed by it. My head was spinning when Ed suddenly asked if my shoes pinched.

"That's an odd question. No, they're most comfortable. Why?"

"Because comfortable shoes are hard to come by. Take them off."

So it was to be a demonstration. I took them off and Ed mounted the control console. Lights flashed, the hum intensified a little, a message showed on the screen. Ten minutes later I had two pairs of shoes. I put one of them on. I don't know which one.

"I think I'd like to get out of here for a while."

"Sure," said Ed, for once sympathetic. "It is a bit of a shock the first time you see it."

Ed stayed behind to do some "fine tuning," he said, ready for the big experiment tonight. I ran up the stairs, anxious to get out into the sunlight. The big experiment—what else could that be but copying some luckless animal? I had always insisted that it wouldn't—couldn't—be done. But then I hadn't believed that inanimate material could be copied, either. But I'd been proved wrong, hadn't I? I dropped my spare shoes in the living room and went outside.

I strolled around the house, my mind in turmoil. I thought

of jumping into my car and driving away. Then I saw Costello raking over a patch of newly dug earth. He'd tidied up the flowerbeds, and there were quite a number of plants struggling to get going. I walked over to him.

"You've done well," I said, indicating the flowerbeds.

He shrugged. "Waste of bloody time, but this place sure needs brightening up. Gives me the flaming creeps sometimes." Flaming creeps was about right so I changed the subject and asked him what he was going to plant now.

"It's planted already. The boss's dog—cute little chap. I'll miss him. Often there was nobody else to talk to."

"What happened?" I reached in my pocket for my car keys—they were still there, thank God. "Did he try to copy it?"

"Copy it? Poor old Luffey got copied all right. Anything that moves around here gets copied. This patch of dirt is full of his copies—rats and mice mostly—and the rattlesnake. I didn't bury the rabbits, I stewed them."

"Hold on—are you telling me that damned machine kills every living thing it copies? And yet he copied his pet dog? And still wants to go on with it!"

"You got it wrong, pal, it's not like that. None of the animals he copies comes to any harm.

And neither do the copies—they just don't come alive."

"Am I glad to hear that!"

"Yeah, well, it's what you'd expect, isn't it? The way I see it, the difference between living things and dead things isn't just the things they're made of or the way they're put together, it's something intangible that's in the living things that gives them life."

"You're a thinker."

"Dunno about that. It was pretty tough where I grew up—I learned to take what was going. Sometimes what wasn't going. Once or twice this got me a lot of free time. I didn't waste it watching the box, I did a lot of reading."

"I can see you make the most of your opportunities. How did you manage to land up here?"

"I was out of work—he advertised for a housekeeper, I got the job. He's a good guy, not prejudiced. We get on okay."

"He's a great guy all right," I said, "and he's long been a good friend to me, and I wonder if his obsession with this machine hasn't unbalanced him."

Costello leaned on his rake and gazed out over the rocky landscape. "A man would have to be more than a bit crazy to keep trying the impossible the way he does, but that doesn't make him less of a man, does it?"

"No." But I was less than happy.

He started raking over the grave again and that brought me back to earth.

"Tell me about Luffey."

"The rattlesnake bit him."

"After he'd been copied?"

"Yeah, they'd both been copied, the rattler the day before. I took it out of the cabinet, it was still sedated, and laid it in the shade of the garage to recover. Later I saw that it had gone. Then after Luffey'd had his turn he went nosing in that direction and got bitten. There are lots of rattlers about, wonder is it didn't happen before, the way he used to go sniffing after trails."

I thought of the two Brunos and felt relieved. I had once told Ed that there were alternative explanations, but he hadn't wanted to know.

I went inside out of the heat to find Ed seated in the big room with a mint julep in his hand. He got up and poured one for me. I sat next to him in the copy of his chair, or the original, whichever it was.

"Costello has buried your dog," I said.

"Poor old Luffey, a rattler got him."

"He told me. He also told me that none of the copies of your animals are ever alive. Can't you see they never will be? Even Costello knows why."

"As a servant Costello is a gem, but he's no intellectual

even if he has digested the prison library. I suppose he gave you that guff about the intangible something that differentiates the living from the non-living?"

"If you think it's guff, tell me why your copies aren't alive."

"I haven't had the machine tuned quite sharp enough."

"But you have now. As sharp as possible."

"I'm sure of it."

"Very well, Ed, I see you're determined to see this silly thing through to the end, so I'll stay and watch your experiment. But when it's over you must give up this mad idea and come back to reality."

"Why?"

"Because you're ruining your health, wasting your substance. You're too valuable, Ed, to be spending your genius traveling up a track to nowhere. Promise?"

"We'll see. After the test, when you see it work, you may change your outdated ideas."

"If I see it work, I'll have to. What is your latest victim to be? I haven't noticed any animals around here."

"I've left that to Costello."

I was just about to remonstrate when I was startled to see just how old and worn he suddenly looked. His cheeks seemed to be losing what little color they still had. He reached into his pocket and produced a

bottle of pills. He shook one into his palm and popped it into his mouth. After a few seconds the color began to come back, but he still looked pretty awful. I knelt before him and took his hand.

"You gave me a fright," I said.

"Sorry, Robert—I get these little attacks, but they don't mean anything as long as I keep my pills handy."

"They do mean something, they mean you've been overdoing it and strained your heart. Pack it in for a while before it's too late. Your obsession is killing you. Come back with me—our new house is only a stone's throw from the beach where you can laze all day long in the good sea air and read sf stories. Or, on second thought, Westerns and whodunits might be safer."

He managed a smile. "I may take you up on that," he said, "but I'll be fine in a few minutes. I'll maybe go and lie down for a while on my bed."

I made sure he got safely up the stairs and then went in search of Costello. He was still in the garden. He'd dug over a narrow patch, and now he was lifting out the earth and depositing it in a heap. He wore a wide straw hat and seemed impervious to the heat.

"I thought I'd put in some tomatoes," he said. "They do well

here as long as I water them every day."

"It looks more like a grave than a tomato patch."

He gave a wide grin and shrugged his shoulders. "Out here there's always a high probability that it will be. That's one of the hazards of living in these parts."

I told him what had happened while he went on shoveling. Then he stopped and leaned on his spade.

"Had one of his little turns, did he?"

"Gave me quite a shock. I've half persuaded him to come back with me for a break. I think you should come, too, to look after him. He could be a bit much for Carla on her own."

He hesitated and I could almost see his mind working as he sought to turn this new development to his advantage.

"Seems like a great idea. The old guy sure needs a rest. But I don't know about me—I'll have to stay here to look after the place. I don't think he'd be prepared to go away and just shut it up."

I felt myself going off him as I pictured him with the machine to himself... take what was going, he'd said. But there was really no reason for these thoughts so I put them aside.

"We'll see tomorrow," I said, "and about tonight—I think we should call it off."

"The prof won't agree to that. He'll be quite all right by dinnertime. You needn't worry about him."

"Couldn't you call it off? He told me you were providing the sacrificial lamb. Couldn't you say you couldn't find one?"

He really laughed then. "He'd never believe that. You see, tonight I'm to be the sacrificial lamb, as you put it." The shock left me speechless. "And you needn't worry about your friend, he really will be okay."

"It's not him I'm worrying about now. It's you."

"You don't have to worry about me. I know perfectly well what will happen—I'll step out of the cabinet as I went in, and in the other one will be a lifeless thing that looks like me."

"You can't be sure—the other things were animals. And he's been fine tuning it, whatever that means."

"Animals—and plants—and men—we're all the same. The force that through the green fuse drives the flower, drives me."

"It was a good library."

"Not bad; it did have a volume of Dylan Thomas. And as to the fine tuning, I don't know what that is, either, but he always does it and the results are always the same."

"I hope you're right. Personally, I wouldn't get into that box for a million dollars."

"You won't get the chance, buster, I'm going in for a mere half million, paid in advance." He threw his head back and laughed as if he hadn't a care in the world. "Not many people get paid half a million bucks for a night's sleep, do they? So just you forget trying to muscle in on my patch!" He handed me his hat and spade. "A man shouldn't be expected to dig his own grave, should he? Especially if it's time to do the dinner." I was too stunned to resist. "Help you work up an appetite if you've got nothing better to do," he called over his shoulder as he went.

I had nothing better to do. I dug like a robot for almost an hour.

I don't remember much about dinner except that whatever it was that Costello had prepared was excellent. I chatted wildly, keeping off the subject of the experiment, and drank too much. Far too much. The room began to spin and I felt myself falling. . . falling. . . falling. . .

I was lying on a comfortable mattress in the dark. Gentle fingers were touching me. Caressing me all over . . . caressing, probing . . . not just on my skin but deep down. Stroking me like a lover . . . stroking my heart . . . stroking my brain. I had never felt so wonderful . . . so relaxed, yet so alive. There was only one word to de-

scribe it: bliss, utter bliss. I wished it to go on forever. I slipped into a dream, floating away through strange places of great beauty . . .

The dream ended. I was awake and I knew where I was. I was in the copying cabinet. Bliss gave way to anger. A green light came on, and I sat up, bumping my head. I pressed against the lid with my hands, it opened easily, and I stood up. Ed and Costello were standing by the other cabinet. The lid was open and they were peering in.

My blood began to boil. There they were, fretting over my lifeless copy and not giving a damn about me. I climbed out of the box and began shouting. "You unmentionable sons-a-bitches, doping my drink and putting me in this damn machine!" They spun around, both as white as sheets. I grabbed Ed by his lapels and shook him. "Your man I can understand—he's only scum. He took your money and then funk'd the job and doped me instead. But you—you were my friend—how could you!"

He went even paler and began groping feebly for his pocket. I eased him into a chair and got the pill bottle. It was empty.

"Quick, Costello, you know where he keeps them! Get more as quick as you can!"

Without uttering a word he ran up the stairs.

Ed gave a little hopeless sort of smile. I felt helpless.

"God, I'm sorry, Ed, I shouldn't have gone on like that. There's no harm done, I'm right as rain."

He nodded and tried to speak. I put my ear close to his mouth so that he could whisper. "Destroy it," he said, "every damn thing—all of it—there's some dynamite in the workshop. You hear me? I'm finished with it."

"Yes, but Ed . . ."

"Please promise me—I know I don't deserve it, but one last favor. Promise?"

"Of course, but you'll be okay as soon as your man brings your pills."

"Costello won't come, he's scared out of his wits."

"What? Never mind. Where are the pills?"

"In my room . . . bedside cupboard . . ." His voice was fading.

"Sit tight and hold on. I'll get them."

I ran up those two flights of stairs as they'd never been run up before—found his room—found the cupboard—found the pill bottle. It was empty. I heard a car drive by the house and accelerate away. Costello was taking no chances. I knew I'd never be able to prove anything even if I managed to catch up with him.

Ed's head had slumped onto his chest. I laid him on the floor

and hit him vigorously over the heart and did my best at mouth-to-mouth but it was no good. That intangible something no longer pervaded his tissues. He was dead.

When I was sure I could do no more, I looked in the box. There I lay—relaxed, an expression of utter bliss on my face. I touched my cheek. I was cold. I lifted my hand; there was no pulse. I went through my pockets and took out my car keys, driver's license, credit cards, anything that could identify me. Then I went upstairs and out of the house.

The sun was just rising and it was cool. I sat on the steps and thought things out. I knew what I should do and what I would do. I should get in my car and go for the nearest phone, which was about an hour and a half away, as far as I knew. The police would come and sort things out for me. And other mad scientists would get hold of the machine . . .

I went to the workshop, found dynamite and fuses and, as if it had been planned, a time switch. I went to the garage and found cans of gasoline. I went to the generator house and checked the diesel engine. Costello had maintained it well. It was running sweetly, and the fuel tank was more than half full. I carried the things I needed into the basement.

I worked quickly and methodically. Only when I came to the files did I hesitate. There were thousands of sheets of paper, some handwritten, some typescript. There were plans, diagrams, circuits. The life's work of one man and six years of another—both destroyed by it. But Ed wanted it to be wiped out. So be it.

I felt like a vandal in the Library of Alexandria. I no longer felt there was evil in the machine, merely that it was genius misdirected. Surely amongst all this there must be ideas that could be put to good use? Ed had hoped to find something that would help him with his mass transfer thing but had become obsessed with trying to copy life. It was not for me to decide. Ed had made the decision. I scattered the papers through the spaces between the plastic modules. I made up five charges of dynamite and set the fuses to ignite when the fire got going.

Lastly I dragged the thing that was me out of the cabinet and laid it beside Ed for company. Two lifeless bodies—one that had drawn life's breath to the full, one that had never breathed at all. Then I went upstairs and cooked and ate a good breakfast.

Outside I filled in the grave and raked the ground level. I thought of finding some plants

and setting them in it but decided against it.

There were two two-bar electric heaters in the living room. I checked one out and took it down to the basement and nestled it in amongst the papers. Then I connected it to a power socket via the time switch. It was just at eleven A.M. I set the timer for three P.M. I poured ten gallons of gasoline over the floor.

I left the trap door to the basement open and retrieved my still packed bag from the room I hadn't slept in, picked up my extra pair of shoes, and drove away. Nobody ever came to this forsaken place, but the smoke signal that would go up when the fire started might attract attention. It would be best to be well on my way home before that happened. I would have to decide what to tell Carla. The truth, I decided, even though she wouldn't believe it.

As I bumped along the track, the whole episode began to go through my mind. Ed copying

my shoes. Costello burying the dog—and what he had said about the intangible something that accounted for the difference between the living and the non-living: Intangible . . . untouched . . . *cannot* be touched . . . *may not* be touched? Suppose . . . just suppose Ed had persuaded the little probing fingers to probe just a little deeper so that they had dared to touch the untouchable. And then suppose . . . that the untouchable had a sticky (or magnetic, if it sits easier) quality so that it stuck to the little examining fingers and got carried back, along with other messages, to the little building fingers: . . .

Suddenly it was all clear to me—why Ed and Costello had neglected me while they gawped at my copy, why Ed had literally died of shock when I appeared and Costello had taken to his heels. I had stepped out of the wrong box!

I pulled up onto the verge and waited until the trembling stopped.

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



© N. Jay Jaffee

Looking. Everywhere. We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime, please), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the October Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

FICTION

Blanderson's Blue Blazes

by Jas. R. Petrin



Illustration by Hank Blaustein

74

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When Mrs. Dane woke up that morning with her head feeling ready to split right between the eyes, a sharp pain in her kidneys, and her legs and arms stiff as four boards, she couldn't begin to think just where in the heck she was. And when she tried to open her eyes to have a quick look-see and found them so glued-up she had to lever them with her thumb, and then saw as her very first sight of that new day the flaking yellow wheel of the lawnmower four inches from her face, it was all she could do not to scrunch her face shut again and escape backwards into sleep.

But she sat up and winced against the pain.

Her mouth tasted awful and her ears buzzed.

She was in the shed. Crazy, she didn't know why, but that's where she was. The sun was up outside, a bright swath of summer falling in through two dusty panes above snake-green coils of garden hose, and looking down she could see that what had got her in the kidneys was the butt-end of the spade handle that she had lain on half the night.

She had no idea what she was doing there.

A chilling awareness crept in.

"My God," Mrs. Dane whis-

pered. "I'm having an adventure."

This realization did not please her. She considered herself too old for adventures. She hadn't had an adventure worth mentioning in her entire fifty-three years of comfortably humdrum life, and she didn't want to start having one now.

She heaved up painfully to her feet. She was a big woman, and strong, but she was sore all over. "I feel like I been run over by three truckloads of soldiers and a boy on a bike," she muttered. Then she looked down at her dress.

"Gah!"

Her pink floral was smudged all down one side with the dust of the bare shed floor, so she brushed herself off as best she could with stinging slaps to her thigh. She looked down at the spade once more and noticed the fresh clodded earth on its blade. "Huh," she said. "What do you know!" Then she went out of the shed and across the yard to the house, hoping that super-snoop Betty Glasner wasn't watching, because wouldn't *this* give her something to jump on the phone to Annie Kenessy about?

Mrs. Glasner—the Pinkertons had nothing on her: their logo only showed one peering eye; Mrs. Glasner seemed to have a thousand—she was the

woman who never slept. She'd had her nose glued to her window ever since her husband had run out on her. If she was watching for him to come back, she was going to have a heck of a long wait in Mrs. Dane's opinion.

And then she thought, what if Mrs. Glasner had been snooping last night? She probably had. Brrrr! The idea. Mrs. Dane didn't even want to think about that. At least not until she figured out herself what she had been up to.

Inside the house she found more surprises.

First of all the heavy cast iron frying pan that ought to be hanging on the kitchen wall was lying flat-splat on the shag carpet by one end of the couch. And there were Cal Blanderson's glasses lying next to it. Cal Blanderson . . . that set a wheel turning. Cal had been here last night. She remembered that much now. But what else? She tried to take hold of that wheel, fix a crank to it, and turn it faster.

But that only made her head hurt. Like there were a couple of razor blades propped behind her eyes.

She picked up by its thumb ring an empty glass jug that had once held two quarts of Cal Blanderson's homemade apple cider, but which now held only

a few drops of that vicious liquid and the smell. The smell started her head splitting again. Blue Blazes is what Cal called the stuff on account of a remark she'd made about it years ago after her first swallow—"Phooh! What the blue blazes is this?"

Last night they'd drunk Blue Blazes. That accounted for the almost total blackout, and most of the pain, and the fact that she felt tight as a tick even now.

Then what?

Quarreled?

Right. But so what? They often did that.

Oh, but not like last night, something told her. Last night had been *something else*. Last night had been a *humdinger*. Last night they'd tucked into Cal's latest job lot of cider, and if it had been high test before, it was rocket fuel now. Her poor seared throat told her that, if nothing else.

The empty bottle worried her. Cal's Blue Blazes was scary stuff. Made you irritable. Somebody spoke to you out of the wrong side of their face and *bang!*, you were apt to go off like a cherry bomb. People got hurt.

She set down the jug as if it might explode—you never could tell about those fumes. Then she picked up the frying pan and studied it, thinking hard, trying to remember just what

else besides the cider had made such a humdinger out of last night. She hefted the heavy iron, turned it over, and that's when she spotted the stain on the back of it. Of course, it had to be scorched bacon fat, or burnt egg, but . . .

"Maybe you blipped him," she muttered accusingly to herself. "You warned him often enough—a thousand times at least. Said you'd do it. Then you took a drop too much of that kidney-kicker of his, and hal-lelujah! that was it. He must have been lying here like always with his lip open, blathering, and you crept into the kitchen and armed yourself, then stole up on him on your tippy-toes and blipped him, just like in the cartoons."

A shudder coursed through her sore body. The buzzing in her ears was not going away.

All right, she thought, what do we have so far? Shed. Blue Blazes. Frying pan. Blipped him. What next? She hefted the pan once more. It was good Olympic boiler plate, a twelve incher—two pounds, anyway. The kind of frying pan that if it blipped you, you stayed blipped. So where was he then? Nowhere in sight. Blipped him and toted him, yes?

"Must have done. He ain't here."

But toted him where?

Ah, that was the problem.

She stared around her, taking in the shabby living room—tired-looking is how she saw it—and had to admit that there was no place to hide a body here, not even a bitsy little jiminy like Cal Blanderson, who was a man you might have folded up and stuck behind the television except that it was only a portable one, not a console, and you'd have seen the edges of him showing round the sides and the peak of his Reimer Express cap poking up over the rabbit ears. Behind the sofa? No. Too close to the wall. You could only slide a fellow in behind there if you ironed him out first with a steam roller.

"Cal," she hollered through the house, "get out here!"

But Cal didn't get.

So she went unsteadily through the rest of the house, staggering a bit, room by room, getting more and more annoyed at Cal for not being out in plain view, blipped or not, and didn't see him anywhere no matter how hard she looked, and finally caught herself opening the kitchen cabinets to peer inside.

"Now you're getting desperate, old woman," she said.

Cal Blanderson was proving to be just as pigheadedly contrary in death as he was in life, stubbornly refusing to be found.

"I got to rest," she said.

So Mrs. Dane got herself a Tylenol to glue the halves of her head back together with and went for a nice liedown.

Not far away a telephone went *snick-snick-snick*.

"Hello, Annie? Betty here. Got a minute? 'Course you do."

"Betty Glasner? Actually, Betty, I—"

"You *got* to hear what's been going on next door, Annie. At Cecily Dane's place? Well, I'm just beside myself. Listen. Started last night. Cal Blanderson shows up. Nearly *falls* out of his truck. Corkscrews up the walk like a one-oared boat, toting a big jar of that *awful* cider he makes."

"Cider? I like cider."

"Not this cider, you don't. Huh! You could launch a barn with it. I got a crate of it down the cellar that he gave to me once for going outside and checking on him one cold night when Mrs. Dane tossed him out. That was after my husband ran off on me, of course—not that *he* would've gone out to him, though the two of them claimed to be thick as thieves, drinking till all hours down at the Army-Navy. I had my fill of *that*, I can tell you. But I mean, there he was in Mrs. Dane's front garden. I'd of done it for a *dog*, Annie, him lying

there under the dahlias, naked as a go-go boy with his head on a plastic duck—"

"Not *naked*, Betty, you don't mean really *naked*?" Annie Kerness's voice had taken on a tone of interest, her breathing over the line losing its "so what" regularity, as Mrs. Glasner had meant it to.

"Naked, Annie, means naked. Bare as a beet. Rump to the wind. Under a bush at four A.M. Just as pink as the day he was born, and nothing to guess at—well, you could see why Mrs. Dane kept him around, if you know what I mean. But that's as may be. That cider of his can make people spark off each other like two flints. Which is why I never could bring myself to touch the crate of it, he gave me. I store it in the old coalroom downstairs—it's got reinforced walls."

"And you mean to say that last night you found him out under your lilacs rump-naked again?"

Mrs. Glasner bristled.

"You telling this story, Annie?"

Annie shut up.

"Now where was I? Yes. He showed up there at her door last night and goes bowling on in like the dog come home. Not even a knock. Well, where's the decency? What if she was naked herself, eh? But in he goes, and

I don't see or hear nothing for the next two hours—my elbows got sore from the window ledge; I ate my dinner there. And then suddenly I hear them start in fighting."

"What time was that?"

"You a policewoman now?"

"Sorry."

"You should be. As I was going to say, that was approximately somewheres around three minutes past one."

"Approximately somewheres? That's pretty exact."

"It ought to be. I noted it down."

"You noted it down?"

"'Course I did. On the pad I keep here by the window. My God, if you keep on interrupting, Annie, I won't get to the good part before next Tuesday. Now where was I?"

"Fighting."

"That's right. Tooth and nail. Nothing new, I often told you—it's the cider. But never *this* bad before. Like two cats in a dryer. You could hear them hitting the walls. They screeched awhile, and suddenly it goes quiet, and then out into the yard comes Mrs. Dane, three sheets to the wind herself by this time, and heads straight—well, maybe 'straight' isn't the word for it—to the back shed, and comes out dragging a shovel behind her and puffing like a steamboat trailing an an-

chor, and goes sternwheeling back into the house."

"A shovel?"

"A shovel."

"In the house?"

"In the house."

"More yelling?"

"Nope. Not a peep. None."

"Oh . . . What then?"

"Don't know. I waited a little longer—maybe two hours—then woke up with my chin on the window ledge. So I went to bed. Good grief, you cow, ain't that enough? I got to sleep sometime, don't I? I'm not the DEW line, you know. I'll call you back later if there's developments."

"What's wrong, Betty?"

"What do you mean—'What's wrong, Betty?' "

"You sound nervous."

"Nervous? Me? Not me! Nope! Never!"

The telephone made a clattering noise, as if Mrs. Glasner had fumbled, then dropped it. Then it went *snick*.

Mrs. Dane lay in her upstairs bed holding her head and trying hard to patch together the rag-ends of the night before that dangled just out of reach, knowing what she had to do was snag a few and fit them in place and stitch the evening back together again, proper.

A few more recollections had come to her.

She remembered something

about a disagreement. And hadn't it been something about men competing with women? Yep, it had. She was sure of that now. She grinned at the ceiling; she was getting somewhere. But competing how? She frowned again, clenched her teeth, and screwed up her face in concentration, but the rest of it wouldn't come. Her back throbbed. Her head hurt. Damn! How could a body think with their soft parts all bruised from sleeping on a spade handle, and half their brain cells vandalized by Blue Blazes?

Then, a glimmer of memory. She blinked. That was it—the key to it all—the spade. She was forgetting the spade. Somehow the spade had to figure into all this.

They'd argued about whether a woman could . . .

Could what? Dig potatoes? No, no, it couldn't be that . . . Or could it? She sighed. It was no use. Maybe if she tried to sleep . . .

Her mattress was a heck of a lot softer than the floor of the shed and she closed her eyes and let her hands lie limp at her sides and made herself breathe deep and slow and regularly so that her body was as good as asleep.

But her mind didn't want to lie down.

In fact, her mind wasn't co-

operating at all. Her mind kicked back the covers on its own, got out of bed, and flung its invisible self down the stairs to tramp and inspect and scan and probe all over the spots she hadn't gotten around to yet—the cellar, the yard, the shed, even the trash barrels out back. Remembering the spade, it studied the earth, scrutinized scratchings and loose earth and depressions. It strode around in frustration with its hands clasped behind it, puzzling, and it didn't give up and come grudgingly back to bed until the late afternoon sun had crossed to the bedroom side of the house and was trying to poke its unwelcome self in through the crack between the wall and the K-Mart plastic drapes.

By then her mind had it all figured out.

"You murdered him," it declared accusingly, standing over the bed. "You murdered your best friend, that stinker Cal, and then you took the little jackanapes and hid him someplace under the ground."

"Go to sleep, you old fool," Mrs. Dane commanded, and then just when she suddenly felt her thoughts were ready to lie down with her and do just that, her body yawned and stretched, said enough was enough, and made her get up.

She sat on the edge of the bed. She was a little more sober now—not much, but a little.

Murdered him—could that be true? Yes, and buried him, too. How else could you explain that spade with fresh earth on it, propping up your kidneys half the night?

Well then, she thought, if that's what I did they're going to come looking for him. They always do sooner or later, and so you better figure out where you planted him. 'Cause if you don't know where you planted him you can't make sure they don't *unplant* him. So better hurry. Dig. Find.

Still she dawdled. Wasn't it possible that if she just stopped thinking about it, this problem would slip gradually behind her and into the past along with worries about the thickening mustache on her upper lip, the lengthening crack in the toilet tank, the ever more evident arthritic stiffness in her finger joints and the fresh worry *that* brought, that if she was ever going to learn to play "Yellow Bird" on the piano, she'd better send away for that correspondence course like the advertisement said, *NOW! TODAY!*

Wouldn't it fade away?

Nope.

She began to see that this was the thing about murders. You couldn't put them aside

afterwards, like a failed examination, or a trip to the dentist, and then pick up something else and go on with it. Murders glommed onto you. They clung. They stuck to you like something on your fingers that you couldn't scrape off, something that just when you started to forget it you glanced back down at your hands and saw the shadow of it there.

Cal Blanderson—missing.

A spade underneath her.

With fresh clodded earth.

If none of this situation was going to fade away, then it looked like she was just going to have to go along with it.

The situation said dig.

And she would do that.

The telephone rang.

"Annie? Just letting you know. Nothing new to report."

"Well, heck, Betty, why bother calling me up then? You're scaring Boodles, my cat."

"Good grief, I can't go on out and make things happen just to please you, can I?"

"Betty, you got to relax. You're wound up like a two dollar clock. Are you sure you're okay? Are you really so worried about what's going on at Mrs. Dane's house next door?"

"Worried? Me? Nonsense! What have I got to worry about?"

"Just asking, Betty."

"And I'm just telling!"

"You sound jumpy—"

"If I see anything worth jumping about, Annie Kenessy, I'll call you, and you can hurry straight over with your gym shoes on. Or maybe I won't."

"You just don't seem yourself, that's all."

"Don't be ridiculous. You're talking foolishness, Annie. Plain foolishness."

The telephone clacked down to make Annie Kenessy jump in spite of herself, and she dropped her own phone. Boobles jumped, too.

So if digging was the thing, then it came down to two choices as Mrs. Dane saw it: the back yard or the cellar. There was the front flowerbed, too, but even topped up past the eyes on Blue Blazes she was sure she wouldn't have been fool enough to plant a body in a spot like that.

In fact... now that she thought about it, hadn't that very question come up last night?

Yes!

Some small memory, not quite burnt to ashes by an overdose of Blue Blazes, was trying to call to her from the blitzkrieged depths of her mind. But it wasn't calling loud enough; she couldn't quite hear it.

She started with the cellar. Which was where she thought

Cal's body was most likely to be hiding. She figured a cellar was the best place to bury somebody and so it followed it must be the best place to dig that same somebody up. Gut instinct. Intuition. She brought the still damp, clay-clodded spade in from the shed, opened the cellar door, and went three steps down the staircase.

And stopped.

Right there next to the pickled beet shelves, that now gleamed with row upon shiny glass-jug row of Cal's cider, was a dirt pile, high-flung, fresh-dug, and mounded.

Ring.

"Annie—"

"Betty Glasner, is that you again? What is it now? Don't tell me, let me guess... Cal Blanderson's chasing Mrs. Dane around the yard with a skeet-gun, and he's just shot out your front window."

"It's worse, Annie, worse!"

"What? Well, it really must be something then. You better fence off the yard, throw up some bleachers, and sell tickets—"

"Mrs. Dane just came out to her shed, got herself a shovel, and dragged it back into the house with her again!"

"Again? Don't tell me. Did she wear the other one out?"

"It looked like the same one."

But I don't know. I'm worried, Annie. Scared. People with shovels digging all around their place. Why does she want to do so much digging? Answer me that. I'm thinking that maybe she takes the shovel into the house so she can sharpen it. And then she comes back out and . . ."

"And what, Betty?"

"Starts . . . digging."

"What for?"

"For . . . for . . ."

Betty Glasner hung up.

Mrs. Dane sucked in her breath, descended the stairs slowly, set the spade down, and studied the hole in the floor. She peered at the damp, musty sides of the shallow pit, the foot-printed trodden-down soil at the bottom of it, and she whistled low under her breath and shook her head from side to side slowly.

"I did it, all right. I did blip poor old Cal. Put him to bed for keeps. I really did. Just look at that." And she looked back at the mound again. "I put him to bed last night in the ground, and I didn't even bother to finish tucking him in. That cider."

All right. The worst was true.

The question now was whether to finish covering Cal up and smooth the dirt down to hide him, or move him somewhere else. There wasn't a lin-

gering doubt in her mind about the answer to that—she had to move him. There was no way she could erase the signs of digging, and when *they* came snuffling around for him, they'd throw open the cellar door just as she'd done, take one look down the stairs and spot the dirt and that'd be it.

But if they dug down then and didn't find anything . . .

Well.

She set her face soberly, clambered down into the trough of the pit, spit on her hands, and this first hole she took down forty-seven inches before she clambered out, puzzled, and stood staring blankly down into it. She scratched her head. Dry hole. Nobody home. No Cal. It didn't surprise her. It was a trait of his, never to be where you wanted or expected.

"I guess," she mumbled, "the digging was too tough for me down here last night, so I gave up on this spot and tried somewhere else."

It seemed the only possible explanation.

So next she went out and surveyed the yard.

Problem was, Cal wasn't a big man. He was a size you could pick up and tote home with you under one arm on the bus. A size you could bury in a flower pot, pretty near; or trench in under a bush, do it with a

trowel or a soup spoon, easy. Too bad he wasn't more like that three hundred pound Mr. Huett across the street, now *there* would be a corpse for you. A real carcass. You wouldn't drag him away by the boot heels and stuff him, vanishing, under a rock. Not without leaving skid marks an inch deep, you wouldn't—and you'd be wanting a front-end loader to tamp the earth back over him, too.

She walked a slow, careful grid across the yard, paced the whole thing out like an archaeologist preparing to excavate early man. Only Cal had never been early, he'd always been late, and now he was especially so: very late, extremely late, the entirely late Mr. Blanderson. She paced the yard scientifically, just as she had done in her mind in her bed, yard by foot, foot by inch, eyeballing the dust like a keen-eyed Mary Leakey.

There was disturbed earth everywhere. All through the corn patch at the back of the house, all around the potato plants up the side. Mrs. Dane was a thorough gardener who weeded every day, and the topsoil loosened by her busy hoe could have concealed the final resting place of a dozen Cal Blandersons.

She chose the most dis-

turbed-looking spot and began to dig.

This second hole she took down forty-three inches deep by twenty-seven wide, and there was no sign that Cal was here either, or had ever been here, and so she stopped and filled this one in, too.

She was disappointed; but she wasn't discouraged. She knew she couldn't stop digging. She had to find him. And she couldn't shake the notion that he was here lurking under the vegetables someplace. It just seemed proper, in a way. Cal had always liked vegetables.

Panicking a little, she dug two holes, one after another, some thirty-two inches and thirty-eight inches deep, next to the fence, but Cal was not obliging. After that her head was going round, and so she sat on the garden swing beside her spade, to rest up and try to think a little more on what might have gone on last night between her and Cal. It wasn't easy. Her mind was still mutinous, wounded and angry, wanting to go its own way.

"I'm still *drunk*," she said with a startling realization. "Drunk. But at least I'm sober enough now to *know* I'm drunk."

Which went a ways towards explaining a few things. Like why she hadn't felt too much compassion for poor Cal Blan-

derson. Still didn't. How could anyone feel sorry for the little rat? Blockhead Blanderson. Black sheep Blanderson. Blundering, blathering, blow-hard Blanderson. Blue Beard, blue-blaze, bloodstained.

She pressed her knuckles to her brow and hoped that some new recollection would stab through her like a light and point her like a bird dog at the spot where he lay.

Nothing.

She pushed and shoved at her mind until her fist and her forehead were sore, but she couldn't do it, couldn't get the flash of insight she needed; and so she went back to work and this time put down three more holes, only not so deep because her arms were tired, and filled them up again, and was just starting in with a grim, blind purpose on another one when somebody put their head over the fence right beside her and shouted:

"LORD LOVE A DUCK, MRS. DANE, WHAT IN THE NAME OF EVERYTHING THAT'S HOLY ARE YOU MINING FOR HERE—THE SECRET HOARDED-UP TREASURE CHESTS OF GOOD OLD CAPTAIN KIDD?—THE HIDDEN GOLD BULLION OF SOME HOLLYWOOD AL CAPONE?—THE LONG LOST DIAMOND

GEWGAWS OF A RUNAWAY AZTEC PRINCESS? WHAT?"

Mrs. Glasner's real voice was exactly like her voice coming over the telephone, only worse—razor-edged, scratchy, driving through you and through you again like a splintered stick. You couldn't even look at Mrs. Glasner without thinking of the telephone she clung to day and night. It was as if she'd been infected by some sort of a telephone virus, a bug that lurked in the telephone lines waiting for a mouth that wouldn't stay shut, and then leaped in and multiplied.

No wonder Mr. Glasner had run off a while ago. He must have thought it was either that or arrange to have his eardrums surgically removed in self-defense.

At the first klaxon sound of that electric barb-wire voice in the insect humming stillness of the garden, Mrs. Dane felt a chill come over her as if a hand clammy as a wet sheet had been clapped around her neck. Slowly, slowly, ever so very slowly, she straightened and turned to face her questioner. She had to cast about for a second or two to find a smile that would fit her tormented face; then she said:

"Plumbing."

"WHAT?" Mrs. Glasner shrielled.

"Plumbing."

"OH?" shrieked Mrs. Glasner.

"I been fixing to put in a well out here."

"AH," Mrs. Glasner yelled.

"Or a fountain."

"OH."

"Or a sprinkler."

"HUMM."

My God, the damn woman don't believe me, Mrs. Dane told herself. And just look at her. Ready to jump up in the air with her hair on end.

Mrs. Glasner was as nervous as a chicken on a chopping block. She nodded at each statement, feigning good humor, but her chin shook and her eyes kept getting narrower and ever more suspicious, and she kept on increasing the peculiar tilt to her head until she seemed to be staring not at Mrs. Dane, but out towards the front street. She's still in a snit about my dahlias, Mrs. Dane thought, she's always been jealous of my dahlias.

Then Mrs. Glasner straightened and yelled, "THIS IS CRAZY, MRS. D! YOU'RE DIGGING THE WHOLE YARD UP. YOUR HOUSE'LL FALL DOWN INTO A HOLE. FLAT DOWN. MINE TOO. YOU BETTER STOP THIS NON-SENSE. STOP IT RIGHT NOW! THROW AWAY THAT SHOVEL. GIVE IT TO ME! —HERE!"

She held out her hand for it, fingers curving like hooks.

"Betty Glasner," Mrs. Dane said coldly, holding her spade close to her body and keeping her anger pressed down under cool and even tones, "what do you think you're talking about? This is my yard. Mine! And if I want to dig it, then I'll dig it, and if I want to knock my house down, then I'll knock it, and if I want to bury it fifty foot deep, then I'll do that, too, and it'll be nobody else's business but mine, and certainly not *your* business, so kindly do not lecture me, you old air-raid siren!"

Mrs. Glasner gawked back, her mouth hanging open like the mouth of one of those sad-faced tropical fish downtown in Stencey's Pet Shop window. The huff had gone out of her.

"But . . . why?" she managed finally in a tiny voice now. She made a gesture at all the holes. "I only want to know . . . I mean, I'm only asking—why?"

"Maybe," said Mrs. Dane before she could stop herself, "maybe I'm looking for something."

Mrs. Glasner made a small chirping noise like a squirrel that's just seen a cat come round a corner, closed her mouth, opened it again, then dashed up her walk to her house. At her door she turned and flailed a warning finger in the air.

"Well, I think you'd just better stop it! You'd better stop it now, Mrs. Dane!"

But Mrs. Dane could *not* stop it. She was driven. She was now more than ever determined to find Cal Blanderson, and if Betty Glasner was suspicious, well then, all the more reason to hurry up about it. All the same, when the angry echoes of Mrs. Glasner's slamming door had subsided, and she took a long, slow look around her and saw the dug-up and packed-down and dug-up-again garden, and the desperation it spoke of, and the hopelessness, she almost wanted to flop down in the dirt and wait for the police to come knocking and tramping up to her with their shiny handcuffs and their frozen faces and their gentle, prying questions.

But then she took a breath and said, "No."

She was made of sterner stuff than that.

She picked up her spade.

"I'm not waiting for nobody," she said.

The telephone rang and rang, and though she was determined to ignore it, each repeating jangle of its bell was like an electric buzzer pressed against a raw nerve, and Boodles' fur was beginning to stand on end, and so finally Mrs. Kenessy could

think of nothing else to do but pick it up.

"Hello, *hello!*"

"Annie, it's me—Betty."

"Betty Glasner? Well, *what* a surprise. What's the matter? You sound like you've been crying."

"Don't give me that smarty-pants, ice-water treatment, Annie, I know you too well for that, so put your hoity-toity on hold and listen. You ready? Mrs. Dane is out there digging up her entire yard!"

"Digging it up?"

"With a shovel."

"Well, I'm sure she wouldn't do it with her fingers, dear."

"Ha ha. You can joke. *You're* not living next door to a crazy woman."

"Crazy? Is that what you think? That Mrs. Dane's gone crazy?"

"Absolutely. Right off her tea kettle. That's why I got to get doctors out here to make her stop. And why you've got to help me. *I'll* be crazy next. I can't look out my window and see her going at it without wanting to nibble my fingers off at the knuckles, or scream."

"But *why*, Betty? *Why* is she digging?"

"To get to me, that's why. She knows it's making me crazy!"

"Well, I can hardly believe she'd go to all that work just to annoy you, dear, there must be

some other . . . Now, just a minute, didn't you say she was fighting with Cal Blanderson last night?"

"Yes. I said it. But the doctors, Annie. I want you to help me get the doctors out here and make her st—"

"And have you seen hide or hair of Cal Blanderson since?"

"No, but—"

"Oh, my, Mrs. Glasner. Oh, my. You don't think that she . . . Well, that she . . . I mean, you don't think that maybe she did something . . . *reckless*?"

"No! That's not it at all. I . . ."

"That maybe in the heat of their lovers' quarrel she—well, you know. It's like you see in some of those television mysteries. They were drinking that cider, after all. And, Betty, though Heaven knows I don't like to suggest it, that would explain the digging, wouldn't it?"

"No. No, it wouldn't. Not all those holes. The doctors, Annie—"

"But just *think* a minute. If she took her sharpest knife . . . well, it's simply awful to think about, I know, but such things *do* happen, don't they? I mean, we read about them in the papers simply *all* the time. What I mean is, she'd need a lot of holes if she . . . well, if she . . . Betty, I think you got to get the police over there this

very instant! I'll phone them if you want, I—"

"No, no, no, no, NO! It isn't that, Annie. It *can't* be that. And I don't *want* you phoning the police. That's the very last thing I want. I don't know *what* I want except for her to stop what she's doing, just to stop it, stop it, STOP IT!"

There was a click. Then a dial tone. Mrs. Kenessy looked at the handset of her telephone for a moment as if she suspected some technical problem. Then she put the handset gently back down on its cradle. "I don't know what's got into that woman," she said to her cat Boodles. "I swear I just don't know."

The after-effects of the Blue Blazes were now wearing off fast, and Mrs. Dane was feeling more and more saddened about what she had done to poor Cal Blanderson. Now she wanted to find him just so that she could apologize to him. She must have been anesthetized not to feel any remorse before. Or maybe stunned was the word. That was more what Cal's cider did to you; stunned you like a hockey stick laid smartly across the back of your head.

She would find poor Cal, and say a word or two over him, and that's all there was to it. And after that she'd make sure he

got a good and proper burial, but not too expensive, his ashes in an urn, maybe, to spread across the water up at End of Main on Netley Creek, which was the place he'd liked to fish. She owed that much to Cal. But where to look? She gazed around the yard. She'd dug in just about every place he could possibly be.

And so after a few false and half-hearted pokes in the weeds around the back of the steps, she finally, reluctantly, against every notion she had about buried bodies, dragged her spade rattling over the sidewalk, up the side of the yard, and around to the front of the house.

To the front flowerbed. The very last place she felt she ought to look.

Nobody, she thought as she thrust the blade into the loose earth, would plant a dead body in a flowerbed. Not me, that's for sure. I'd know better than that, Blue Blazes or not. It's the silliest thing I ever—

And then she turned over the shoe. She stared at it.

It lay there with the dark soil clinging to it so heavily she had to take a second look to be sure about it, but she could make out the shape of it, and it was a man's shoe, all right, not a slipper, not a lady's spike heel, not a child's runner.

It was at this moment, view-

ing this actual artifact of her deed, that the true enormity of her crime came swelling up on her and choked up her throat so she could hardly swallow and pressed on her lungs so she could barely breathe.

The spade fell from her hand. She felt a fearful sweat gathering on her brow and she wiped it off with her forearm. Oh, she had done an awful thing, a terrible thing. It came home to her now. "I feel just sick," she moaned. Gone were her earlier notions about disposing of evidence, eluding the police. She'd had those callous ideas under the lingering effects of Blue Blazes. Now all she wanted to do was to march right downtown and up the steps into the police station and demand to be set in the electric chair, or tossed into the gas chamber, or dropped through the floor with a rope under her chin, and to have her punishment all completed and the mess of it cleared away before the day was out.

She looked down at her hands, nearly black with the digging, and at her dress, still smudged down one side from her nap on the shed floor, and not much improved by her exertions throughout the day.

"I'll clean myself up," she sniffed. "I'll make myself presentable. I'll get into my downtown clothes, and I'll point

myself at downtown, and then downtown I will go."

Leaving the spade on the grass, she trudged into the house and up the stairs to the linen closet. She got out some fresh towels, patted them sentimentally—she wouldn't be needing fresh towels again—took them into the bathroom and set them down, still neatly folded, next to the sink. She looked at herself in the mirror.

A murderess stared back at her.

"I don't know you," Mrs. Dane said. She leaned closer to study those alien, criminal eyes. "You mean to say you been here all these years, locked up inside me, lurking, and I never once seen you before?" It was a haunted face she saw in the glass, hollow-eyed and dirty where soiled fingers had touched it. No wonder Mrs. Glasner had galloped off so fast. Here was the face of a woman capable of anything. Well, maybe the shower would help.

She was just turning away from the mirror when a movement caught her eye. She wasn't quite sure she had even seen it at first. She had to lean forward and peer more closely into the reflection of the glass.

And what she saw made her heart almost jump up her throat and fall into the sink. At least, that's how she described it later.

Because the bath curtain behind her was beginning to slither back.

The insistent burr of the ringing echoed through the house, and Annie Kenessy snatched the receiver up irritably and pressed it to her ear and listened.

It was Mrs. Glasner's voice, of course. For a moment, though, it seemed that Mrs. Glasner couldn't articulate, only mumble, which prompted Mrs. Kenessy to demand sharply, "That you, Betty?"

"Yes . . . yes, it is, Annie."

"You sound terrible. Positively *terrible*. What's wrong over there? More funny business next door?"

"Funny . . . ? No, not funny. Awful. Just awful, Annie. And getting worse. Will you . . . ? That is, would you . . . ?"

"Would I what? Come on over? 'Course I will. You sit tight now—and keep your door locked. I'm on my way."

Cal Blanderson stepped unsteadily out of the bathtub, where he had bedded down the night before, swayed dangerously, and embraced the sink.

"You're wrong. We didn't argue last night," he insisted. "We discussed. And our discussion had a little bit of a physical emphasis to it."

"Okay," said Mrs. Dane, "we discussed. But what did we discuss about, Cal? Can't you remember neither?"

Cal lowered himself gingerly onto the toilet seat and held one trembling hand up to his head. He winced as he spoke, as if he couldn't stand the noise.

"'Course I remember what we discussed about. We discussed about your neighbor, Mrs. Glasner."

As if a drawn curtain had been yanked back to reveal a sunny day, Mrs. Dane did recall that her neighbor had indeed been the topic of discussion the previous night.

"Mrs. Glasner," she prompted excitedly. "Yes, yes, go on."

"You said how awful she'd got lately, growing into such a mean-mouthed gossip on the telephone. And then you said as how it wasn't really her fault at all, but was her old man's fault for having took off on her like he did, and left her flat-footed."

"Right," said Mrs. Dane, "and you said—"

"I said that he hadn't taken off on her at all. And you said what made me such a know-it-all, of course he'd taken off on her. And I said he couldn't of done a thing like that, that I'd known him from the bar at the Army-Navy, and that he wouldn't of so much as run to

the corner store without having got her permission in writing, and I bet you dollars to dog biscuits the old battle-axe killed him off and that he's been most likely pushing daisies up out in her front flowerbed ever since."

Mrs. Dane sagged. She sat down on the edge of the tub. It was all coming back to her now in a flood; clear and quick, like a stream knocking over a dam.

Cal blathered on. "And then you said *I* was wrong, that nobody in their right mind would bury a body in their flowerbed, that a flowerbed was the first place the police would look, that what a person ought to do with a body is to bury it under the cellar floor—"

Mrs. Dane took over.

"And *you* said, maybe, if the digger was a man, but a cellar floor would be too trampled down and packed in and boot-printed for a feeble woman to dig through!" Mrs. Dane said triumphantly. They were both hollering now. "And I shouted, 'Feeble, eh?' and then ran out—"

"And fetched in the spade—"

"Dragged it downstairs—"

"And proved me wrong!" Cal finished up, shouting. And then more quietly, "At least, I guess that's what you did. I bunked down in the tub here with my shoes on about that time." He tried to get up, slumped back down again on the toilet seat,

both hands gripping his head.

"I'll tell you one thing for nothing," he said.

"What?" Mrs. Dane asked.

"I ain't going to drink that cider again."

"Until next time, you mean," Mrs. Dane said. Then she added, "It's terrible stuff, I'm not sober yet, and the worst thing about it is that even after I thought I'd killed you, I couldn't even feel sorry about it."

"I wish you had killed me," Cal muttered, nursing his head.

"I might yet," Mrs. Dane said. "Now get out of here. Get up. Go. I got to shower the cellar floor off my skin." He got up, was halfway out the door, and then she added, suddenly remembering, "Just a ham-dam minute." She looked at his feet. "If you got both of your shoes on, then whose shoe is that I just turned over ten minutes ago in my front flower garden?"

He stared back at her, bleary-eyed.

She dragged Cal out for a look.

He stood on the front lawn with the shoe in his hand, scraped a bit of the mud off it, nodded.

"Do I know this shoe? Oh, yes. Darn right I do. Or at least I used to know it. I know who wore it. Like I told you, we were drinking buddies for a while. Yup, I've seen the bottom of this shoe lots of times."

"But how the devil did it get here?" Mrs. Dane asked.

Together they turned slowly and looked across the fence at the neighbor's house.

"So where'd she hide it then?" Mrs. Bradley-Jones asked.

"Hide what?" replied Mrs. Kenessy. She felt self-assured, confident, aware that the mantle of telephone guru had passed from Mrs. Glasner's shoulders to her own. Which was just as it should be. It was hers by right. She'd served her apprenticeship. Hadn't she been Betty Glasner's closest confidante?

"Her husband's body, of course."

"In the flower garden."

"Now why'd she be so foolish as to hide a body there? Why, the first place any curious half-wit would look is in her flower garden."

"But it wasn't *her* flower garden. It was her neighbor's flower garden. Mrs. Dane's."

"Mrs. Dane's?"

"Clean the home perm out of your ears, Josie. Haven't you heard one thing I've said? They found poor Mr. Glasner in Mrs. Dane's flower garden. Pretty cute, eh? Planting him there. She knew the police wouldn't dig up the entire street, no matter how suspicious they got, if they *did* get suspicious, which they did not. And he'd still be there, too, only Mrs. Dane found

that shoe, and then the police came with a dog, and the dog went sniffing and digging and scratched the rest of him up quick as a soup bone."

"You were there, Annie?"

"I said I was, didn't I? Betty asked me over. Practically begged me. She was beside herself. She'd been watching Mrs. Dane out rooting around the yard all day, and after that there was her and Cal Blanderson out poking in the flowerbed, and I guess what she needed right then was some moral support. I got there quick as I could. At first she wouldn't say anything. Just sat there all trembly and sniffy. I wondered why she kept glancing out the front door, and then when we saw the police car drive up next door, well, she just broke down, the poor dear, laid her head down on the Arborite table and told me everything. It just spilled right out of her. Like a flood."

"What did she say?"

"I'm coming to that—don't rush me. She said it was wrong of people to think she was a gossip, that she wasn't really, that she was only trying to keep her ear to the ground to try and find out what people might be saying. And she said she wasn't a snoop either, that all the time she'd only been worrying that somebody might start poking around in that flowerbed, and

that she had to keep an eye out in case anybody ever did because then the only thing she could do might be to go on out then and there and put the run to them."

"Like a sentinel?" Mrs. Bradley-Jones sighed.

"A sentinal? What the heck's that? Don't change the subject, Josie. Anyways, she blamed everything on that cider she got from Cal Blanderson, said her and Mr. Glasner took a drop of it one night, and he said something, and she said something, and the next thing she knew she was tamping the earth down around him in Mrs. Dane's garden with the night flying around her like it was hung on the end of a rope. Heck of a job, too, lifting the dahlias up and settling them all back in again, nice, and smoothing it all over and carting the leftover dirt away, and spreading it around her yard like they did in the movie *The Great Escape*. Must have taken her ten trips with a bushel basket to do that. Nice work, though. You'd never of known he was there. I never knew he was there, and I looked at Mrs. Dane's flowers a hundred times."

"So what happened then?"

"They drove Mrs. Glasner off in a car. Then they hauled her crate of cider away in one of them bomb disposal trucks. At least, it looked like a bomb disposal truck."

"It must have been just *awful* for you, Annie."

"It was. I went on over to look, of course, but that bossy policeman Al Sigurdson—you know, the schoolteacher's boy, not the Sigurdson up from Lockport—he wouldn't let me near. I can imagine it well enough, though. Him lying there in the fertilizer with the dahlias all around him, flat on his back with his mouth flopped open the way I seen him splanged-out on Betty's living room couch so many times. What a sight."

"Whew. That cider must be something."

"You got that right." She paused. "In fact, I just recall I

got a bottle of it put away somewhere, myself. Part of Betty's supply. I kind of popped it into my purse at the height of all the excitement. I been thinking maybe tonight I'd raise the cap off and just put it through a little bit of a taste-tester or three to try and find out what all the shouting's about. Why don't you drop over and take a swallow?"

"Wouldn't that be dangerous? I mean, what if . . . ?"

"What if what? You don't think it'd come between *us*, do you? We're friends. We always get along."

"I never thought of that."

"Well, think and use your head for a change, you silly cow, and come on over."

UNSOLVED

by Lassiter Wren
and Randle McKay

*Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?
The answer will appear in the March issue.*

Hawley, the velvet-voiced boss of the West Side mob, went on talking to his henchman while his servant, a man of herculean build, served drinks, emptied ashtrays, and performed various little services around the room. The men were discussing the leakage of some plans which had been thwarted by the police.

Hawley's henchman was plainly uneasy. From time to time he eyed the huge valet speculatively, and when the man's back was turned, he caught Hawley's eye, indicated the valet by an abrupt nod, and looked questioningly at the chief.

Hawley laughed quietly. "No, you needn't worry about Big Felix," he said. "He's okay. Besides, he's as deaf as a post."

"Maybe so," Bill replied, "but didn't you ever hear of lip readin'?"

Hawley smiled again, and replied confidently:

"Sure. But he's not looking at us. Besides, he generally stays in the next room when we're talking, and with the door closed. That's where he was the other night, so he couldn't have seen us talking. He's got tact. He doesn't even want to look as if he was listening. Of course he can read lips if he wants to—that's how he gets most of my orders. No, Felix is okay."

But as the valet leaned over to open a drawer near them, the henchman, as if accidentally, knocked off the table a heavy brass bookend, which fell with a great thud on the floor. He had winked at the chief. Both eyed the servant keenly, watching for a reaction; but the man was imperturbable. He did not turn his head or register the slightest recognition of the sound.

Bill gave a sigh of relief and picked up the bookend, nodding begrudgingly to his chief. The valet finished his work in the room and withdrew to the next, shutting the door after him. And the men continued to talk of forthcoming "jobs" by which to recoup the coffers of the mob.

1. *Do you think Hawley and his henchman were right in being certain that the valet was loyal to their interests?* 2. *Why?*

"The Gangster's Valet," from The Third Baffle Book by Lassiter Wren and Randle McKay, copyright 1930 by Doubleday, a division of Bantam. Doubleday, Dell Publishing Group, Inc. Copyright 1930 by Clues, Inc. Used by permission of the publisher.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FICTION

Claiming Territory

by Morris Smith



Illustration by Donald Cook

96

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Her headlights illuminated the pair as they climbed out of the ditch and reached the grassy shoulder. They were heading toward the pavement. They seemed caught in that moment, in her yellow beam of light.

Myrtis Vincent, a teacher retiring the next year, was driving back to Lake Best after dinner in town. She'd left her friend Roberta's as the ten o'clock news started, and when she passed the Madison fork, she rounded a curve. She was on them all at once.

"Hee-ey," the nearest one called. He stuck out a thumb half-heartedly, as if he knew it was useless. Her car lights touched his face—smiling, white protruding teeth, blond hair against a dark backpack. The slouching figure behind him was a blur. In that split second she got the impression that they were tired; probably they'd been resting in that ditch. And not really caring. Tired and nonchalant, like hippies used to be.

Her car rolled past them. The thought struck her that she'd never seen hitchhikers on that road, and she had spent the month of August at Lake Best for years. She'd driven that road a hundred times or more. Lake Best was small and private; farther on a few side lanes led to fishing ponds and an old Four-H camp. But there was no place to hitchhike to, particularly at night. The road hadn't even been paved long. Of course, in about five miles, a highway cut across and wound its way to the expressway. Maybe they were taking that route.

Stars shone in the night sky like bright pinpoints. Ahead, on her right, Myrtis spotted the dark shapes of two house trailers hugging the edge of a field, her markers at night. She slowed for a left turn. A dirt lane lined with trees led between two stone pillars. A sign—LAKE BEST: PRIVATE, NO TRESPASSING—was dim in the moonlight.

Twisting, she looked behind. The empty road stretched, a paved ribbon of midnight blue. Two curves and a mile or more separated her from the hitchhikers. They wouldn't see her taillights turning in, if it mattered.

She parked under a tall magnolia close to the house and didn't think of them again until she was rocking, smoking a cigarette, on the wide screened porch. She liked a few minutes there before going to bed. Sometimes she would toy with ideas for poems then. Poems—when she retired, she'd have time to write a poem a day if she liked. With her eyes half-closed she tried to conjure back an idea for a poem she'd had that morning, but instead the face of the blond hitchhiker slid into her mind.

"Heee-y," he said, lackadaisical.

She wished she weren't alone. For a while her sister Daphne with two grandchildren had shared the house; two days before they had moved back into town. Daphne complained about the heat and said that the boys needed to get ready for school anyway, whatever that meant. Myrtis hadn't minded seeing them go. Now she wished they were back, filling the house with their noise.

Practically, the house was too big just for her—large rooms, upstairs and down. Skirted by porches and split by a hall, it had been built by her grandfather while he was still a young man; built as a summer place for his rowdy family of ten. The year before he had bought the lake from a desperate friend for two hundred dollars cash and a cancelled gambling IOU. "Best lake deal ever made," he had boasted back then. "Lake Best it is."

Now, the screens on the windows didn't fit and mosquitoes got in. Large families didn't stay there any more. Until she came, the house had been closed since the August before. Most of the others had their own houses down near the water—compact, air-conditioned, with floating docks and boat ramps. Myrtis didn't envy them. This house suited her, she suited the house. She didn't intend to leave before Labor Day this year, even if she was alone. It was too bad, she thought, that the others were already moving back into town. Last year she had moved in the same day as Lawrence and Dot. Their place was so close that some nights she could hear Lawrence snore. This year their refrigerator broke. They locked their green cabin and left.

Myrtis reminded herself that she wasn't exactly alone. She hitched her chair closer to the screen and peered through the trees. A bar of light from her brother Edgar's house shone faintly. Edgar and Ruth always stayed through Labor Day. She leaned farther to see if any light showed in her cousin Tommy's A-frame. It was dark.

Keeping an eye on Edgar's beam of light, she thought again of the poem. After breakfast as she sat in that same chair and smoked her morning cigarette, an idea had stirred.

She'd been gazing down the hill and wondering if she should go fishing. The air was still. While she rocked she became aware of calls, shouts, in the distance. A whoop was followed by a laugh, both faint—like children playing far away. She couldn't tell where the shouts were coming from. For a moment she stood and craned to see the old swimming dock at the bottom of the hill, although

she knew no children could be there without first passing by her. Finally she decided the cries came from the trailers back on the paved road. Children, chasing each other in the hot sun around those trailers, in that treeless field. And here she sat, shady and comfortable on a porch with a lake at the bottom of the hill. She had never noticed children around those trailers; but their voices were carrying through the trees. A girl's high laugh pealed, muted by distance—real but unreal. Something stirred in her and Myrtis knew she wanted to write about that sound, but before she could think it out, a car motor hummed. Eva Grace, a neighbor farm woman, had rattled up to sell vegetables.

Now, at night, she couldn't recapture that moment when she heard the girl's high laugh. She balled her fist, tapped her mouth, and stared through the trees. Edgar's light went out. Ruth had left Monday for Ponte Vedra, she remembered—four days of bridge-playing at somebody's beach house. That left only Edgar. His hearing had gotten worse. It had never been good.

The second man. Did he have on a checked shirt? Or was it plaid flannel?

She walked from one end of the wide hall to the other, dropping the latches on the screen doors. During the summer this was mainly to keep out the dogs. The real locking at Lake Best started after Labor Day when the wire gate at the entrance pillars was swung shut and secured with a padlock. That was a week away.

Her steps echoed through the living room and into the kitchen. She walked past the old wood stove sitting on a brick pedestal like a retired queen, its top covered with red oilcloth. By the back kitchen door she stopped beside a white gas range. An old ice pick rested by the rear burner.

Myrtis closed the outside door and dropped the ice pick, point down, through the rusty hasp. This door, she thought, unlike the screened ones, could withstand a good bit of pressure if anyone tried to get in.

The second hitchhiker—he'd looked heavier. His shirt was plaid flannel. Shirts like that weren't worn around here in the summer. Probably they were from the north, maybe going on down to Florida. Miami. The drug traffic.

She stopped her thoughts. "Eva Grace," she said aloud and smiled. Eva Grace lived alone, raising chickens and vegetables. She thrived on scare stories and talked constantly about the danger of someone's escaping from the county prison farm and breaking

in on her, even though the prison farm was on the other side of town. Eva Grace had three locks and a bolt on each door. Even her windows were nailed down.

In the hall, Myrtis hesitated. Overhead a yellow bulb dangling from a string cast a circle of light onto the gray floor. Two bedroom doors faced her, one opposite the living room and the other the kitchen. She'd been sleeping in the front bedroom since Daphne and the boys had shared the larger back one. The boys were afraid to sleep upstairs. "Those stairs are *steep*," Carl had said. "This house is too spo-ooky," Keith whispered. They were used to modern houses.

Tonight she would sleep in the back bedroom, she decided. For some reason she wanted to, and it was true that one of the mattresses was better. In a few minutes she had moved her things. She pulled the cord, snuffing out the hall light.

Myrtis creamed her cheeks, bending close to the mirror and straining her lips from side to side. Her face looked framed in the dark oval over the washstand. The mirror surface was speckled with age—like her face, she thought, not really minding. She loved the old things in that room. She rubbed the cream slower, listening to the bass notes of a bullfrog. Her hand almost stopped. Between croaks, somewhere in her mind, a conversation was starting. The voices were like an orchestra tuning up. Then they strengthened.

"Hell, we haven't seen a car for thirty minutes. Only one in an hour," the heavy one complained. (Yes, he'd be the one.) "I'm not spending the night in no damn ditch."

"That sign says no trespassing. Private property," the blond warned. He adjusted his backpack. Tired.

"So?" (He had a face now. Swarthy. A young Rod Steiger.)

"Maybe they got dogs, guns."

"Shit. It's those farmhouses—or trailers like those over there—that's got the guns and dogs. They're the ones you better watch out for. This is Lake Something. I bet there's an empty boat house." He chuckled. "Or maybe some rich people's houses."

(No, not rich. She nearly stopped the voices but let them talk on as she slowly creamed her forehead.)

"Hee-ey." The blond grinned, straining his Adam's apple. "You think so? But you don't know how far it is to that lake. Could be five miles. I think I'm for the ditch."

"Don't think, smart-ass. This is *your* shortcut, remember? The boonies, and we oughta be in Daytona by now."

"We-ll, I thought it'd get us past that town without running into any cops. It will. It'll get us to I-75."

"Not tonight."

"What time is it? How far do you think it is down that dirt road to the lake?"

"About eleven. I bet it's not more'n a ten minute walk."

(Five, Myrtis whispered, as though prompting an actor.)

The blond stopped, dug for a cigarette.

"Are you coming?" the one in the plaid shirt barked.

"Okay, okay. But let's stop to smoke first. It could be longer, you know."

"Now, I don't expect any trouble, but have your knife ready. Just in case."

They hunkered down, smoking, by a stone entrance pillar.

Myrtis twisted the top onto the nightcream jar. She hiked the side of her mouth. With an imagination like that, maybe she should do TV scripts when she retired instead of poetry.

She raised her arms and threaded them through the sleeves of her gown. White seersucker cascaded down. As her head popped through, she had a moment of certainty—as she did sometimes when she hit on the right word for a poem. They would appear.

The gown settled. The moment passed. But her breathing was short, shallow, and she sank down on the bed gripping the metal post. Her imagination was running wild, she knew. Yet it could happen. Her bravery had definite limits. She wasn't like Roberta, who sometimes hiked alone in the Smokies and slept out under the stars.

She glanced at her watch. Not quite eleven. She could put on her robe, run down to Edgar's, try to make him hear—even sleep in the hammock on his porch. Hide in the bushes? Or she could drive back into town and be at Roberta's in fifteen minutes. She would just tell her she was afraid, that's all.

Robe on, car keys in hand, she hurried through the shadowy hall. Her slippers flopped against the boards with quick thuds. When she reached the porch, her steps slowed. Framed by pine branches, the moon shone across the wicker sofa and lighted a magazine so she could almost read the words on the cover. She stopped. If she left now, would she ever be back? Would she stay in this house again, rock in that chair? Even if she got up her nerve, someone—Edgar, Daphne—would stop her. "Remember how scared you got?

Anyway, it's not safe," they would say. "Times have changed." Eventually the house would be boarded up.

In the kitchen she slid open a drawer. She chose a knife with a long, wide blade. She had cut a watermelon with that same knife that very afternoon. Hurriedly she tested the edge and nearly nicked herself. This was silly, she thought. She would never be able to use it. But at least she wouldn't be defenseless—if they did show up.

Myrtis placed the knife on the floor and sat on the edge of the bed. Ridiculous as it seemed, she was glad that blade was there, gleaming by her toe. Her heart was hammering away, and her temples throbbed. She needed to calm down. She took slow breaths, listening. Outside the same bullfrog rasped, and deep in the woods she heard the shrill cry of a screech owl. Nothing more. Still, she strained her ears. How had she gotten herself into such a state? Was she going to spend all night listening to an owl screech?

Inhaling, she scanned the bed table. In a shoebox she'd brought from the front room were a flashlight; Band-aids, some odds and ends, and a plastic pill bottle. Those were sleeping pills, she knew, prescribed six months before when she'd had such pain with her back. Back then she took only half a pill at a time. Should she take one now—or two—to get her through the night? Would that stop her mind?

At the washstand she poured out a glass of water, then looked up in the mirror. "You're something, Myrtis," she muttered. "Getting a knife to fight, then taking pills to knock yourself out." She gulped down three.

She swung her feet into bed. Lying back, she heard the conversation again, could see their faces. The scene reeled through her mind like something in a movie.

"Look," the swarthy one said, getting up, glancing around. "There's a gate over there, pushed back along that fence. Left open for us. Ha! Let's go."

The blond hitched up his backpack. "Okay. I've got my knife ready. But all I really want is a place to sleep." He fell in beside his partner. They hoofed through the moonlight.

Myrtis stared into the darkness. Knives. Back when she was in grammar school, boys used to play a game with their pocket knives. Each one toed a line and flipped his knife, trying to make the blade stick into the ground. An upright knife claimed territory.

She threw back the covers. Without turning on the light, she

scooped up the knife. She padded through the hallway to the front bedroom and flung open the door. "If they want beds, there they are," she said aloud. Returning, she knelt in front of her door and, with a quick jab, stuck the knife into a floor board. It quivered, like a javelin. Those grammar school boys would have understood, she thought.

Inside, Myrtis dropped the latch. She pushed the washstand over to the door, jamming it under the knob. She had enough strength left to crawl into bed.

Foggy wisps closed in, dragging her into a cavern of sleep. Way off she seemed to hear steps—or things clinking—in the hallway. "They're late," she murmured. Had she thought them there? she wondered drunkenly. Then she slipped into the welcoming cave.

In her dreams the children from the trailers ran through the house, laughing, shrieking. Hiding under the stairs and jumping out at each other. Up and down the steps they tromped. They slammed doors. A skinny girl with reddish hair, a blond boy in faded rompers. She called, but they didn't listen; they couldn't see her. They kept playing, chasing. They seemed so at home in the house.

She slept eleven hours. Finally awake, she stared at the ceiling for twenty minutes, clearing the fog from her mind.

Still in her robe, Myrtis was at the sink finishing the dishes when a pickup swung to a stop by the tall magnolia.

"Morning, gonna be a hot one today," Eva Grace said. She wiped her feet and opened the kitchen door. "Brought your eggs. Last time this summer, I guess. Hey, you're running late, ain't you?"

Myrtis nodded, washing a cup. "Vacation's over next week."

"Well sir, I wished I could sleep late." She sagged, elbows on the white gas range. "Lord, I bet I didn't get two hours' sleep last night. About ten thirty I heard something outside—splat, splat, splat. The lights were out, just my TV on, you know, and I sneaked to the window and looked out. There was two figures—young fellers, I thought—sitting by the ditch and throwing rocks at my "Fresh Vegetables" sign. Durndest thing. Just like they didn't have nothing else to do. It was a bright night and I could just about see 'em. I was fixing to call the sheriff's office to see if any escapees were around, but they moved on. They seemed too childish to be escapees. Going on down to Green's Pond, I guess. Still, it sure shook me up."

Myrtis scrubbed a pot. "Was one . . . well, heavysset and wearing a plaid flannel shirt?"

"Plaid shirt? No, ma'am. They both looked skinny to me, and before they left, I was wondering if maybe one was a girl. Why? Did you see them?"

"No, no. I guess I was thinking about a TV show or something."

Eva Grace pushed an egg carton across the stove top. "Well, tired as I am, I better get moving. You'll be back next summer, I guess."

"Yes, I'll be back." Myrtis finished rinsing a plate and turned. "Maybe I'll make some repairs. Things are getting run down. You know, I was thinking, too, about those children from the trailers on the paved road. I might ask them down for a swim."

"Huh. Those trailer children look kinda wormy to me. But this place could sure use repairs." She ran her hand across the stove and picked up the ice pick. "Get a new one of these, if they still make them. This'un's all bent up."

At the foot of the hill the lake shimmered like quicksilver. A red squirrel scooted up a pine. In a rocker Myrtis smoked her noon cigarette. The bedrooms could wait—and the knife, still holding itself bravely upright.

Her head felt a little light, but her thinking was clear. She reached for a pen. The poem, the girl's distant, enveloping laugh.

Important Notice to Subscribers: All subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. 7055, Red Oak, Iowa 51591. For change of address, please advise 6 to 8 weeks before moving. Send us your current mailing label with new address.

FICTION

Hit and Run

by Robert
Lopresti



Illustration by Peggy Ransom

105
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Peter Shawn sat in his car and chomped on a cinnamon bun with guilty satisfaction. Diane was on one of her health food kicks, and anything remotely edible had been banned from the house.

After an early breakfast at home—warm fruit juice and a bowl of shredded cardboard which claimed to be a nutritious fiber cereal—Shawn had decided to stop at the Springfield bakery before proceeding to work. Danish pastry and a coffee with double sugar were doing much to restore his faith in humanity.

Main Street was practically deserted. Everyone else had too much sense to be out and about at six A.M. on a Saturday, he thought, especially on the morning after the high school football team's biggest game of the year.

None of which had mattered to Mr. Lomax, of course. Lomax was neither a football fan nor a late sleeper. It would never have crossed the division president's mind to ask Shawn about his weekend plans before setting up this dawn meeting.

"Shawn, I need to have those sales figures before I leave for New York. Seven A.M. on Saturday, all right?"

He hung up before Shawn could point out that there were other ways of spending Friday night than doing unpaid over-

time. Not that he particularly wanted to go to the football game, but he hated being taken for granted.

"Don't you get any time for yourself?" Diane had asked. "Why should you spend your weekends cleaning up that Allington's boy's messes? You should have his job anyway."

Peter Shawn sipped coffee and brooded, one finger tapping on his steering wheel. He was thinking of sharp replies to his wife, to Lomax, to all the people who seemed so eager to tell him what to do.

Fast answers wouldn't do him much good, he reflected. He was a middle-aged executive with a mid-level job in a mid-sized corporation, and the only thing that seemed likely to change was his age.

The blare of a car horn interrupted his thoughts. He looked up in time to see a white sedan come over the crest of Main Street at—what speed? Shawn was no good at estimating such things. But it was clearly too fast for the deceptive hilltop that marked the center of town.

An elderly woman, small and frail in a blue coat, had been crossing the street, and the driver of the white car hadn't seen her until it was too late.

My God, no, was all Shawn had time to think; then the woman was a rag doll flying through the air. She looked al-

most comical as she tumbled over the hood of the sedan, but there was nothing funny in the way she hit the street.

Shawn froze, eyes wide, coffee cup halfway to his lips. Two people had rushed out to the victim, and the white car had slowed down, was stopping—

No, it wasn't. After a single glance behind him, the driver had sped up again and was heading away from the hill at full speed.

A hit and run, Shawn thought. How could anybody do such a thing?

Someone has to stop that car, he thought feverishly. He twisted in his seat, watching for a police car to come racing out of the distance.

No police. No siren. A few people running around, pointing and shouting. It was six in the morning and most of the town was still asleep.

Only one man was sitting in his car; only one man could possibly chase the white sedan.

If there had been time to think, Shawn admitted later, he never would have done it. As it was, his hands seemed to move of their own accord.

One hand threw his coffee cup out the window. The other tossed the last piece of bun to the car floor.

His engine was already running. He slammed the car into gear and pulled out onto the

road. A sharp U-turn and he was heading down the hill, two blocks behind the white sedan.

Shawn honked his horn. He had no clear plan; he simply thought the honking would bring the other man back to his senses. Surely the driver would realize he couldn't escape and would come back. Common sense would have to take over.

The other car sped up, pulling away from him.

Shawn pumped more gas. I'm racing a killer down Main Street, he thought. This can't be happening.

His hand went back to the horn and hit it again and again. Someone back there would be calling the police. They would hear the horn and follow. It would be a matter of minutes at most.

What in God's name would make a man do that, he wondered. Hit a woman, probably kill her, and just keep going? What kind of man could do such a thing?

He slammed the brakes; the sedan was turning. It had made a sharp right off Main Street onto Mill Road. Shawn followed with one hand on the steering wheel and the other on the horn. Didn't anybody hear him?

He looked at his speedometer, winced, and squeezed the steering wheel more tightly. They were doing fifty down the hillside, double the speed limit.

Diane won't believe this, he thought. She always says I drive too slow. Well, I don't believe it either.

At the bridge the sedan veered left, crossing the ravine and starting up the slope, away from Springfield. They were in the woods now, and the growl of their engines was the only sound for miles.

This guy must be crazy, Shawn thought with a shudder. If he would kill a woman he didn't know and just keep going, what would he do to a man foolish enough to chase him?

What would Shawn do if the other man stopped his car here, miles from nowhere, and turned to face him? For a moment, his foot rose from the gas pedal.

Foolish enough to chase him, Shawn thought again. What could look more foolish than chasing the man and letting him get away? He was already going to be late for the meeting with Lomax, that couldn't be fixed. But if he helped the police catch the guy, at least he had a good reason for being late.

He slammed the gas pedal down, starting to narrow the gap between the cars.

They were on Old Maple Street. Another five miles and they would be in Maplewood, a fair-sized town where somebody would have to hear his honking and call the police. Well, that was all right with

him. Neither his car nor his nerves could take much more of this.

But the sedan didn't head for Maplewood. Shawn had forgotten about the new interstate: now the sign loomed up, and the white sedan turned and was climbing the entrance ramp before he could even touch his brakes.

Shawn had to back up to follow, wondering as he went whether the other driver knew what a good choice he had made or had just been lucky.

The interstate was not yet finished, stopping at a dead end ten miles to the west while the highway department and local residents argued over the route for the last leg. That meant the road got very little use, since it didn't connect two big cities as intended. And the modern sound baffles that covered the hilly area around the road made honking a horn just about useless.

On the highway the white sedan picked up the pace. Shawn looked at the speedometer once and then looked quickly away. He was not at all sure that his car could take such speeds, or that he could drive them.

What the hell do you think you're doing, he asked himself. You're no hero. You can't even stand up for yourself in an office squabble.

Take the Gene Allington

business. Diane didn't understand why he liked the kid. After all, Gene was a VIP's son, pushed into the position of division vice-president at an early age.

But Allington was hard to hate, Shawn once tried to explain to her, because he didn't take it for granted. He knew he had been given an advantage and was trying hard to deserve it. More than once Lomax had wanted to turn in a report to headquarters as being Allington's work alone, only to have Allington insist on sharing credit with all those involved.

Yes, a good kid. Just inexperienced, and that's what made it harder for Shawn, who was expert in the areas where Allington was weak and led to his doing overtime, to fill in the gaps. If only Lomax would recognize—

The white sedan cut across three lanes, pulling into an exit at the last possible moment. Shawn hit his brakes, and the car began to skid. He raised his foot and swerved onto the ramp, missing a wall of concrete by inches.

Keep your mind on what you're doing, he thought as the car straightened out. If you get yourself killed, office politics won't matter a bit.

The exit sign read SOUTH COLBY, a small town he had never been through. Large or

small, though, it was a town, and someone would have to hear his horn.

As they pulled onto the main road—empty as the highway had been—Peter Shawn tried to tighten the distance. Glancing at the speedometer he spied a warning light on the dashboard.

His heart rose in his throat. The fuel light. He was almost out of gas.

He swallowed hard. It was all for nothing. Wouldn't everybody have a good laugh now? Peter Shawn, the vigilante with an empty gas tank. Won't Diane have a fine time reminding him that she *told* him he needed gas . . .

The white sedan had reached an intersection, the town's major crossroad by the looks of it. The driver hesitated for a moment before starting to turn left.

I will not be made ridiculous, thought Peter Shawn. I will not.

He yanked the steering wheel left, turning onto the wrong side of the road.

Because the other driver had made up his mind at the last moment, the white sedan made a right angle turn. Shawn, starting farther back, drew the hypotenuse of the triangle.

This was his last chance and he knew it. He flattened the gas pedal and caught up with the

sedan at a long angle. His front fender nicked the sedan's left rear bumper.

The other car's rear end shot away and turned a telephone pole to firewood. Shawn's car kept going, crushing the sedan's trunk. His forehead dusted the windshield before the seat belt yanked him back.

Peter Shawn sat in his car, too stunned to move. This was his first-ever traffic accident, and he had caused it himself, on purpose. What do you do after that?

Hands fumbled at his car door, someone trying to rescue him, he supposed. He struggled out of his seat belt just as the door opened and two strong arms began to drag him from the car.

It was a tall man, strong and blond and wearing a look of pure hatred. "You stinking idiot! Look what you did to my car!"

He drew his fist back. Shawn closed his eyes and waited for a blow that did not arrive.

"Hey, buddy, take it easy," someone was saying. A fat man in a mechanic's uniform had grabbed the blond man's arm. "We saw everything and we called the cops. Let them take care of it."

"The cops." He let go of Shawn, who dropped to the pavement gasping for breath.

"Look," the blond man said,

"I gotta make a phone call. Somebody's waiting for me. Is there a booth around here?" He began to push through the crowd.

Shawn tried to speak and coughed instead. He rose slowly to one elbow. "Stop him," he croaked, and swallowed hard. "Don't let him go. He's a killer."

The crowd murmured. "He's a what?" "What did he say?" "Hey, you hit *him*, pal."

"He's a killer," Shawn repeated. "If you let him go, he'll never come back."

"Yeah?" asked the mechanic. "So who did he kill?"

"An old woman in Springfield. Hit and run. I've been chasing him ever since."

The blond man spat, missing Shawn by inches. "This guy is nuts. You saw what he did to my car. Now he says it was my fault." He started walking and found the mechanic in his path.

"Let's just wait here for the cops."

Shawn closed his eyes.

“Well, you bagged a good one, Mr. Shawn.” Lieutenant Byrne was grinning from ear to ear. From the moment Shawn had been brought to the South Colby police station, Byrne had taken him under his wing. When the Springfield police backed up Shawn's story, Byrne had been

as proud as a teacher with a prize pupil.

"You got the identification?" Shawn asked. He was seated at a table in the squad room, sipping tea and trying to calm his nerves.

"Sure did," said the other cop, a sergeant named Catalano. "The creep's fingerprints say he's Eddie Graybill. His license says something different, of course. He's wanted in three states for assault, armed robbery, and a bunch of penny-ante stuff."

"Really?" Shawn blinked. "My gosh."

Byrne grinned. "I'd say you did a good morning's work."

Work, Shawn thought. Lomax was waiting for him at the office, waiting with a plane to catch. What time was it?

"By the way," Byrne continued. "I checked with the chief. There won't be any charges filed about that accident of yours."

"My accident..." Shawn swallowed hard. "Uh, my car... was it badly damaged?"

"Totalled." Catalano shrugged. "Your engine is a pancake."

Shawn dropped his head in hands. How was he ever going to explain this to Diane? She'd say he was crazy, and she would be right.

"That reminds me," said Byrne, "Mike Cysinski wants

to talk to you before you leave. He owns the car dealership down the block from where you crashed."

"I didn't notice," said Shawn.

"Well, his chief mechanic — that's the guy who held onto Graybill until we got there, he told Mike about it, and Mike wants to make you an offer."

"Yeah," said Catalano. "I love this. You gotta hear it. Cysinski wants to put your smashed-up car on display in the front of his lot. He says he'll swap you a brand new one for it."

"Swap?" Shawn sputtered. "Trade me a new car for my wreck? For heaven's sake, why?"

"Publicity. This story is gonna be in all the papers tomorrow, and he wants to advertise that people can come to his lot and see the car. He figures it'll bring in lots of customers."

"Sure," Byrne agreed. "People like to associate with heroes."

"Heroes," Shawn muttered, blinking.

"You don't believe it yet, do you, Mr. Shawn? Wait till the reporters start in on you."

"Yeah," said Catalano. "And the chief must have the reporters gathered by now. We'd better go to the roll call room and meet them."

"One moment," said Shawn. He wasn't sure if publicity was a good idea. If the blond man knew his name... "That guy,

uh, Graybill. I guess he'll be out on bail right away?"

"Fat chance. One of the charges against him is bail-jumping. No judge will take a chance on a clown like that, not with his record. He won't be out on the street for years and years. Now," he grinned, "let's go meet your public."

The new car—only a loaner, Cysinski had assured him, until a brand-new model with all the options had been prepped—seemed strange to him, and Shawn drove it slowly. After the mad race of the morning, it seemed as if he were hardly moving at all.

When he finally pulled into the corporate parking lot, Lomax's Cadillac was the only other car in sight. He found the division president alone on the fifth floor, sitting in his corner office and frowning at a pile of paperwork.

"Where the hell have you been, Shawn?" he bellowed. "I had to change my flight, waiting for you."

Peter Shawn waited for the old familiar panic to emerge. Instead he felt a sudden, giddy realization: He couldn't leave without my figures. He can't get along without me.

"I'm sorry, sir." He placed his pages on the desk. "I was delayed. I asked them to call you—"

"So that phone call was authentic? I thought it was a joke. Some crazy story about you being held in a police station."

"I can explain—"

"Well, you had better," Lomax roared. "I'm half a day late because of you."

"Sir, if—"

"And the police station! One of my executives! What am I supposed to do about that?"

"Well," said Peter Shawn, "you could fire me." With a heavy sigh, he dropped into the visitor's chair.

He watched with satisfaction as Lomax's jaw dropped. His boss looked every bit as amazed as Shawn felt.

"Of course," he went on, "the Sunday papers will report that I'm a hero, and some people might think it strange that I was fired because I was catching a dangerous criminal—"

"A criminal?"

"I was chasing down a killer, wanted in three states." He waved a hand casually. "Sorry I was late, but those TV cameramen—"

"Television . . ." Lomax looked dizzy. "Now listen, Shawn. I didn't say anything about firing you. Obviously you couldn't avoid being late. Just give me the sales figures, and we'll talk again when I get back from New York on Tuesday."

He gave what was meant to be a friendly smile. "Your job

here is perfectly safe."

"But I don't want it."

Lomax began to sputter, and Shawn hurried on. "Let's be realistic, Mr. Lomax. I'm not working as a department head any more. I spend most of my time helping Gene Allington. He's a real good kid, but as a vice-president he's green and he needs support."

Lomax was scowling. "So what do you want?"

"Assistant to the vice-president. I'm doing the work already. Why shouldn't I have the title and salary to match? I'm sure Gene would agree with me."

He smiled. "Why don't you think about it on your trip? I'll take Monday off—believe me, I need the time to recuperate."

"On Tuesday I'll clear out my desk and you can tell me whether I should take my things home or take them upstairs to the office next to Gene's."

He stood up and turned toward the door. "Have a nice trip."

"Shawn," said Lomax. "Peter, wait a minute."

"I'm sorry, John," said Shawn. "I have to go. My wife was expecting me back hours ago. And I have a few things to say to her."

(continued from page 4)

end, 1990. Guest of Honor: Clive Cussler. For information, write to:

Midwest Mystery and Suspense
Convention

Little Professor Book Center
Baker's Square

13455 West Center Road

Omaha, Neb. 68144

Membership is \$35, which also

entitles you to a free "Keep Your Eye on Omaha 1990" T-shirt. As with Malice Domestic, the mystery fans who attend will find a number of mystery authors also present; at this writing the list includes Charlotte MacLeod, Loren D. Estleman, Rob Kantner, Bill Pronzini, Marcia Muller, and many others.

Playing Dolls

by
Taylor
McCafferty



Dusting, straightening, making sure nothing is broken. My back is killing me all the time now, and this feather duster feels heavier with every passing day. I reckon it's the responsibility weighing down at me.

I never thought I'd say it, but I actually miss Mama. I do. Of

course, she knew I would. She made sure I'd miss her.

Mama's been dead just a month now, but it seems like a lifetime. A lifetime made up of hours and hours of cleaning and dusting and constant vigilance. Constant.

I don't dare slack off. It seems as if there's things to do every

single minute. All the things Mama took care of before she got so bad sick. She took care of everything right up until that last couple of days. Then her heart got so bad that she couldn't hardly move any more.

It was real bad that last day. Me and my brother Merle and his wife Delia all gathered around the bed, waiting for what we all knew she had to finally give us.

Merle and I had the same dazed expression on our faces. The same unbelieving expression. It was that hard to believe that this tiny, frail woman who laid right there in front of us, gasping for her every breath, was really the woman we'd all been so scared of all our lives.

Sometimes it seems like there never was a time when I wasn't scared of Mama. But of course there was. Back when I was real little, before I understood exactly what was going on, I remember actually loving my mama, actually thinking that it was a wonderful thing to have a mama who still played with dolls.

Even that long ago, Mama had quite a few of them dolls—dolls she'd made herself. "It's a little hobby of mine," she'd say proudly.

Sometimes, back then—before I started school and began hearing all the rumors—Mama would even let me hold one of

her dolls. I didn't know better; I was too little to figure out what she was really up to. I just felt special, being allowed to touch one of Mama's dolls when she wouldn't even let my big strapping older brother stay in the same room if the dolls were out.

"Now isn't this a pretty one?" I remember Mama saying, holding out a tiny long-haired wax figure toward me, tantalizingly.

"You be careful, Rhonda Sue," Mama must've told me a hundred times. "Hold it real tight. These are real special dolls, you know."

"I know that," I always answered back, indignant that she would think I could be so careless. But of course I didn't know. I had no idea how special Mama's dolls were. Not until I dropped the daddy doll that day.

I'd just turned five so that day must have been over thirty years ago, but I still remember it so clearly. I guess what happened that day burned it right into my brain. Never, ever, to be forgotten.

I was holding the daddy doll, like I always did, rocking it back and forth, cooing to it. And like always, being extra careful because the daddy doll was my special favorite. It wore tiny denim overalls, just like my real daddy, and it even had

wisps of brown hair that exactly matched my real daddy's. Maybe its looking so much like my real daddy is why I loved that little doll so much. It was kind of like loving Daddy in miniature.

Anyway, I was sitting in the big overstuffed chair in the living room, holding that doll, Mama standing right next to me, smiling. Suddenly the doll just slipped out of my grasp. To this day, I still believe Mama jostled my arm, and that's why the doll fell. But you would never have believed that, the way Mama started carrying on.

Mama yelled at me just as if she hadn't touched me at all. I remember looking at her wide-eyed, while she screamed, "My God, child, what have you done?" All the time she was yelling, though, I could see this sly gleam in her eyes. Even at only five, I could see that.

The daddy doll fell to the floor with a soft thud, its tiny wax head striking first, bending sharply to one side.

I let out a yell almost as loud as Mama's, and scrambled down after that doll. As soon as I picked it up, though, its tiny head wobbled brokenly to one side.

To this day I can still feel how funny that doll suddenly felt. Cold and strangely heavy. I held the doll out to Mama and said, "Can you fix it?"

Mama took the tiny object out of my hand the same way you might pick up a dead roach. "No, Rhonda Sue," she said, "it can't be fixed. Once a doll is broken, it can't be fixed." There was something almost smug in the way she said it. As if she was trying not to smile. She turned and dropped the doll into the trash.

Real soon after that, the telephone rang. To tell us about the unfortunate accident at the lumberyard where Daddy worked. He'd fallen and broken his neck, they said.

Over the next few days it seemed like the whole town was running through our house. Merle and Mama were both crying right out in the open, right in front of everybody; but I was so little I wasn't sure what was going on.

I don't remember Daddy's funeral hardly at all; I just remember sitting in church, in my Sunday hat, wondering where my daddy was. When I finally figured out that Daddy wasn't ever coming home again, I started doing some crying of my own.

I must've cried off and on for over a week, lying on my bed, sobbing into my pillow. Until finally one afternoon Mama came and stood in my bedroom doorway. "All right, Rhonda Sue," she said in a voice as cold as ice. "I think that's enough

bawling. Now get up from there right this minute."

She washed my face and combed my damp hair, and said, "You probably wouldn't have been seeing a whole lot of your daddy any more, anyway. Being as how he'd gotten himself a girlfriend in town."

After that, she never spoke of Daddy again. Also, after that, whenever Mama wanted to show me one of her dolls, I shook my head no. I don't think I'd really figured out everything by then, but I did know I didn't like the way those dolls felt any more. I couldn't forget how cold and heavy that little daddy doll had suddenly felt. So when Mama held out one of her dolls to me invitingly, I put my hands behind my back. After a while, Mama stopped trying.

She didn't, however, stop making dolls. She made them right in front of us. While I and my brother were watching TV, when other mothers might've been crocheting an afghan, or making potholders, our mama was making herself another doll.

When I was still in elementary school, Mama made her dolls out of soft wax, shaping little hands, tiny feet. I remember sitting at her side, fascinated in spite of myself, watching Mama's hands while she deftly shaped a tiny face. All of Mama's dolls ended up

looking a little worried.

Later, when I was in my teens, Mama started making her dolls using the readymade dolls that were in all the toy stores by then. "Why, these dolls are a Godsend," Mama would chuckle to herself, adding long strands of blonde hair to the synthetic hair of a Malibu Barbie. My own hair was blonde, but back then I didn't have the courage to ask Mama whose hair she was using.

Over the years I watched Mama add hair and bits of cloth to Ken dolls, and Six Million Dollar Man dolls, and a couple of G.I. Joes. All of them looked even more remarkably lifelike after Mama got through with them.

By the time I was in junior high I knew, of course. I'd pretty much figured it out on my own even before Merle talked to me one afternoon right after I'd turned thirteen. That afternoon Mama had been after me to iron some of her dresses. I guess I was feeling rebellious the way teenagers get, and right then I just couldn't see why I had to be her slave. So I told her so. To her face.

Before Mama could even answer me, Merle had jerked me out of the room. "Are you crazy?" Merle said, his eyes showing the whites all around. Then he blurted out the whole thing.

"She's dangerous, Rhonda

Sue! She can do things to you with them dolls of hers," Merle said. He went on and on about all the times Mama had given him headaches, and stomachaches, and sprained ankles. "Any time I ever crossed her, something happened." Merle was four years older than me, but right then he looked like a little kid, about to cry.

I didn't want to believe him, but I'd heard too many rumors by then and I'd seen too much. Funny thing, I remembered, it *did* seem as if every single time somebody in town made Mama mad, something happened to him.

Like the time Mama got into an argument with old Mr. Isaacs, the fat butcher, over how much gristle was left on the steaks. Mr. Isaacs had just moved to Pigeon Fork, and Mama had bought a whole lot of meat from him during his grand opening. She started complaining about it the first day she cooked up some of it. When she complained to Mr. Isaacs, he just smiled and said, "Ain't you never heard of 'let the buyer beware'?"

Mama looked like she might explode. "I'll teach that old man a thing or two 'bout 'beware'!" Mama said. She started working that night on a Pillsbury Doughboy doll. Putting strands of gray hair on its head, and giving him a cloth apron. Right

after that, oddly enough, poor Mr. Isaacs ended up in the hospital with a broken leg.

After he got out of the hospital, Mr. Isaacs tore up Mama's bill. He told her, his eyes as round as Mama's Doughboy, "Anything you want is on the house."

I was standing in the butcher shop right next to Mama when Mr. Isaacs told her that. I could see through the door in back of him old Mrs. Isaacs standing there, watching, her face as white as her husband's apron.

It made me feel sick inside to see the fear on that poor woman's face. So when we got home, I tried to talk to Mama about it. Mama, amazingly enough, didn't even try to deny what she'd done. In fact, she seemed almost eager to talk about it with me.

"It's a gift, Rhonda Sue. A wonderful blessing! You could have it, too, if you'd let me teach you the—"

I interrupted her. "But, Mama, it's mean to do stuff to people."

Mama actually laughed, a not attractive sound. "Nonsense," she said. "It isn't mean. It just helps folks see things real clear, is all."

"It scares people, Mama."

Mama shrugged. "Look, God wouldn't have given me a gift like this if he hadn't meant me to use it."

"Maybe it wasn't a gift from God," I said.

Mama didn't say anything, just turned and walked out of the room. But she gave me a look before she left. A look that made me feel suddenly very cold.

That night I had myself one of the worst headaches of my life. I'd had headaches before, but this one made me see colored lights even when my eyes were closed. The next day my head was still hurting so bad I could hardly talk.

When the pain finally eased up some, I came right out and asked Mama. "Do you have a doll of me, Mama? Do you?"

Mama looked straight at me and said, "Of course not. What would I need a doll of you for?" Then she added, "I reckon your headaches are just caused by your being so upset all the time. It's not right for a girl to be questioning her mama every five minutes the way you do. It probably makes you nervous."

But then, just before she turned away, she gave me that look again.

So I knew. Just like Merle knew. Just like the whole town knew. In a town the size of Pigeon Fork, you couldn't keep something like Mama a secret. Everybody knew sure as shooting that anybody who crossed Mama would have something terrible happen to them. So no-

body ever crossed her. Nobody ever came around much.

On Halloween not one kid ever showed up at our door to trick or treat. Not one. I heard the kids talking, too, as they hurried past the house. "That's where the witch lives," they'd say in hushed tones.

It wasn't just on Halloween either that kids didn't show up at our door. It's real lonely growing up in a town that's afraid of your mother. I guess that's why I was a sitting duck for Clint.

Clint Kerns transferred to Pigeon Fork High during my senior year. That was the year Merle finally found a girl Mama approved of. After Merle and Delia got married, there was nobody left at home any more except me and Mama. And Mama's dolls, of course. I remember feeling more alone than ever.

Then one day I saw Clint Kerns saunter into study hall, and my heart almost jumped out of my chest. With scruffy bluejeans and blond hair falling across his forehead, it was obvious that he was trying hard to look like James Dean. The thing was, Clint was succeeding.

After one week, he had every girl in school falling all over him. When Clint fell into step beside me after study hall one day and said, "You doing any-

thing Friday?," I thought for sure I'd been asked out by a movie star.

I guess I never will understand what made Clint notice me. Maybe it was the attraction of an easy conquest. Real easy. We ended up in the back seat of his black Thunderbird on our second date. I was that anxious to make sure he'd keep coming back.

And he did. He kept asking me out. Of course, after a while we never really went anywhere. We just ended up at the park, or the drive-in, with the windows all fogged up around us.

The same week I found out I was pregnant, I also found out Clint was dating two other girls. I was almost two months late by then, and I'd driven all the way to Munfordsville to a clinic. There I gave a fake name and address. I think the woman behind the desk knew I was lying, but you could tell she didn't care. She didn't know your story, and she didn't want to. I must've cried all the way back to Pigeon Fork after they told me the news.

That was on a Friday, and that whole weekend I didn't get one phone call from Clint. On Monday at school I couldn't find him neither. Finally, one of his friends told me, "I guess Clint's off playing hooky somewhere with Mary Alice."

I just stared at him. "You know—Mary Alice?" he said, smirking. "Clint was out with her last night."

There was only one Mary Alice at Pigeon Fork High, and she was a rich girl whose father owned the hardware store. I felt as if Clint's friend had kicked me in the stomach.

After school I drove straight to Clint's house, hoping Clint would tell me his friend had been wrong. Clint was just pulling into his driveway when I drove up. Sitting next to him wasn't Mary Alice, though. It was Claudine Krebs—a girl the whole school talked about. Word was that she'd had two abortions before she was fourteen.

When Clint saw me, he looked real mad. He stomped over to my car and said, "What're you doing here? Following me or what?"

"I need to talk to you, Clint," I said. Claudine had gotten out of the car by then, and she was walking over to where we were. When she got to Clint, she draped her arm around his waist. "What's the problem, lover?" she said to him.

When I heard that, I couldn't seem to talk any more. I just started the car and pulled away.

The next day I stayed home from school; I guess I looked as awful as I felt because Mama didn't even question that I was

sick. Late that afternoon Clint called me up, apologizing. "Look, nobody means anything to me but you, baby," he said. "I'm crazy about you, I mean it." And like the fool I was, I agreed to see him on Friday night.

I'll never forget Clint's face that Friday after I told him about our problem. He looked as if he might laugh. Right in the middle of what I was saying, he held up his hands. "Hey, wait a minute now. It's not our problem. It's *your* problem. So do something about it. I mean, I don't even know for sure it's mine, right?"

If I'd had a gun in my right hand then, I'd have shot him without even thinking twice. "Clint, it's yours."

"Like I said, I don't know that, do I?"

I could hardly breathe. "Clint," I said, my voice trembling, "you don't want to mess with me."

He grinned. "Baby, I think I already have," he said.

Something seemed to explode in my head. I said then the most awful thing I could think of. "You're going to be sorry, Clint. I'm going to tell my mother."

Evidently, Clint hadn't lived in Pigeon Fork long enough to hear about Mama because he actually laughed. Right out loud. "Oh?" he jeered. "What's your mother going to do, spank me?"

I reached over and took a

strand of hair off his coat. "You'll find out," I said.

Clint did find out, too, the very next week. He found out about Mama first-hand. He got busted up real bad in a car accident. He died five days later in the County Hospital. They say he was in terrible pain right to the end. When Mama heard about it, she said, patting me on the back, "Some things are necessary, Rhonda Sue. Sometimes people have to pay."

Up to that very moment, I admit it, I'd been feeling glad about Clint. When I'd listened to the stories circulating around school about Clint and all the agony he was going through, I had wanted to cheer. Mama patting me on the back put an end to that. Suddenly my heart began to pound, and it was all I could do to keep from shrinking away from her hand. I looked at her, at the malicious joy on her face, and I realized suddenly how much like her I was becoming.

Mama evidently thought so, too. She gave me a wink and said happily, "I'm going to teach you how it's done, just like my mother showed me, and her mother before her." She might've been talking about handing down a family recipe.

I took a step forward. "No, Mama, I don't want to know. Never. It's—it's an awful thing to know, Mama."

Mama looked as if I'd slapped her. Her voice was suddenly crisp. "Well, Rhonda Sue, I'm certainly not going to beg you."

I turned to go, but Mama's voice stopped me. "But—if you don't let me teach you," she said, "one day you'll be sorry. You wait and see."

I walked on out of the room without looking back. That night I waited for one of my awful headaches, but it never came. I thought maybe Mama was having pity on me, being as how I was expecting and all.

The next day Mama moved all her dolls down to the basement—down to a locked room. She started wearing the key to that room on a chain around her neck, and sometimes when we were having dinner, she would sort of fondle that key, looking at me speculatively. I always looked away.

Besides, I had a lot of other things on my mind. I was trying to decide if I wanted to go ahead and have Clint's baby. Maybe it would be best to just erase all reminders of him.

It was Mama, surprisingly enough, who talked me out of it. "When you do a thing, you've got to pay the piper," she said, pointing her finger in my face. "Besides, it would be murder."

I didn't know what to say. *Mama*, talking about murder, as if she thought it were a horrible thing.

Mama must've taken my silence for consent because she added, "Don't worry now, I'll help out with the little one. You're not going to be alone in this."

I was so amazed at this new side of Mama that I just looked at her. Was she serious? And if she was, could she actually help? Mama had been having heart trouble for some time by then, and it seemed as if she were taking medicine now all the time for it. "Mama," I finally said, "do you really think you're up to it? A baby can be real demanding."

Mama waved my worries away. "Go on with you," she said. "I think I'd enjoy taking care of a young'un again."

My daughter Elisa Jean was born in September of that year. Holding her in my arms, I started to cry. I was so glad Mama had made me go through with it. My baby daughter was so sweet, so soft, so adorable.

Three weeks later I went to work at the dry goods store in town to support my sweet baby. Mama kept Elisa Jean during the day, and she didn't even charge me for it. I actually began to believe that I'd misjudged Mama some. That maybe Mama had a side to her that I had never let myself see.

I believed it, too, until the day of the biggest thunderstorm that had struck Pigeon

Fork in ten years. It was right after Elisa Jean's fifth birthday, and it knocked out power for miles and miles. That day the dry goods store closed up on account of the power failure. I must've come home a good three hours early.

As soon as I pulled into Mama's driveway, I saw that she'd lit the kerosene lamps. You could see them flickering inside. When I opened the front door, I saw something else.

Elisa Jean was sitting on Mama's lap in the living room, and both of them were singing to one of Mama's dolls. Elisa Jean was sort of rocking back and forth, with her eyes closed, crooning softly.

"No-o-o-o!" I heard someone scream, and it was only after I grabbed up Elisa Jean that I realized it was me.

Mama stayed real calm, though. She turned slowly and very carefully put the doll down on a table in back of her. "Why, Rhonda Sue, you're home early, dear," she said.

I barely heard her. "I won't have it, Mama. I won't! Elisa Jean is not going to do this!"

"Do what, Rhonda Sue?" Mama's eyes were like slits now.

"I don't want her learning this—this *evil*!"

Mama actually smiled patiently, as if I were the five-year-old. "Rhonda Sue, it's been

in our family now for generations. It's your heritage—and Elisa Jean's." She looked at Elisa Jean, held tight in my arms, and smiled wider. "Look at her, she's a natural. It's just like breathing for her."

I looked, and what I saw made me want to scream again. For all my yelling, my little girl was still smiling faintly, her eyes dazed and far away. I tightened my arms around her and said, "Elisa Jean, honey? Elisa?"

She stirred in my arms and began that awful crooning again.

I actually shuddered. "Elisa Jean!" I yelled and gave her a little shake. She seemed herself after that. She blinked innocent blue eyes at me and said, giggling delightedly, "Oh, Mommy, guess what—Grammy and I have been playing dolls."

"I don't want you playing with Grammy's dolls again, Elisa Jean," I said. "It's naughty."

Elisa Jean's pretty face creased into a frown. "No, it isn't, Mommy," she said, patting my face with her small hand, "it's *fun*. Grammy's going to teach me how to play with dolls the best of all."

I looked over at Mama just in time to catch a triumphant look pass over her face.

I knew right then, right that minute, what I would have to

do. To save Elisa Jean. Because Mama wouldn't ever give up. She'd be after Elisa Jean every second behind my back. I wouldn't be able to guard her forever.

I would have to do what I had to do soon, too, before Mama taught Elisa Jean too much—and before Mama herself could even realize what was happening. Or else Mama might decide to play her games with *my* doll.

I made up my mind, and then I turned to Mama: "I can't fight you, Mama," I said. "You win."

"Don't I always?" she said evenly.

That night, after Mama was long asleep, I tiptoed to the bathroom we shared and got Mama's heart medicine. I emptied out the brightly colored capsules and very carefully replaced the white powder inside with flour.

It worked even better than I expected. The very next day Mama called her doctor, complaining of feeling faint. His advice was to double her medicine.

That, of course, didn't help. By the weekend Mama was so weak she couldn't get out of bed. I called Merle and Delia and they and their kids were there within the hour.

When Merle and Delia saw how bad sick Mama was, they both just looked at me. Not one of us said anything about call-

ing her doctor again.

After that, there wasn't really anything any of us could do, except stand around trying to look upset that Mama was finally on her way out of our lives.

Late that evening, Mama rallied enough to talk. She called me to her side and pressed something into my hand. "They're yours now, all yours," she whispered, her eyes suddenly bright.

I opened my hand, and realized she'd given me the key. The key to her basement room. I grabbed that key, thinking that as soon as Mama was gone—and her awful spell was broken—I was going to have myself a little bonfire.

I turned to leave, to go down to the cellar to get the doll that was me—and to find the doll that was Elisa Jean—when Mama's voice stopped me. It was a hoarse croak, but I could understand every word. "My going doesn't mean anything, you know."

My heart began to pound. I wheeled around, looking at Mama. She was trying to smile, her mouth stretched into a ghastly grin. "Those dolls will be just the same as always. You can't destroy them, or else—" The effort to talk was evidently too much for her. She closed her eyes for a minute. Then she began again, her voice even

weaker. "If you'd have let me teach you, you would've known—"

Lord forgive me, for a second I wanted to kill her with my bare hands. I went on down to the cellar, Merle right behind me. "It's okay," Merle was saying. "It's okay. We'll all just take our doll and keep it, that's all. We'll just take our doll, and—"

He kept saying that right up until I unlocked that cellar door. I reached in and turned on the light, and then for a full minute Merle and I just stared at the shelves in that room. Shelves that held hundreds of dolls. Rows and rows of Barbies, rows and rows of Kens, and rows of Skippers.

Merle was the first to speak. "How do we tell who is who?"

"We don't." I took those stairs two at a time, running upstairs as fast as my feet could carry me, determined to make Mama tell us exactly where she'd put each of our dolls. On what shelf, in which part of the cellar?

But Elisa Jean was softly sobbing in Delia's arms, just outside Mama's bedroom door when I got there. Delia shook her head at me, and I knew that

Mama had won again. She'd made me accept my "heritage" whether I liked it or not.

Today I can tell you exactly how many dolls there were in that basement room. Three hundred and sixty-one. Three hundred and sixty-one dolls to take care of. I've found that if I don't keep them well dusted, Elisa Jean and Merle's boys begin to get asthma real bad. Or if it gets too damp down there, we all get chills.

Then, of course, there's mice and worms and mildew—it seems as if there are a million things I have to guard against. Merle and Delia have offered to help, but how can they? I'm afraid to move the dolls, and I really don't trust anybody else to look after them.

Sometimes, here lately when I'm dusting and cleaning and airing out the basement room, I remember what Mama told me that day Clint died. You're going to be sorry you didn't let me teach you.

Oh, Mama, you were so right. I *am* real sorry. Maybe if I'd let you teach me how to make a doll do its worst, I'd have also learned how to make it stop.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

The Magic Casket

by R.
Austin
Freeman

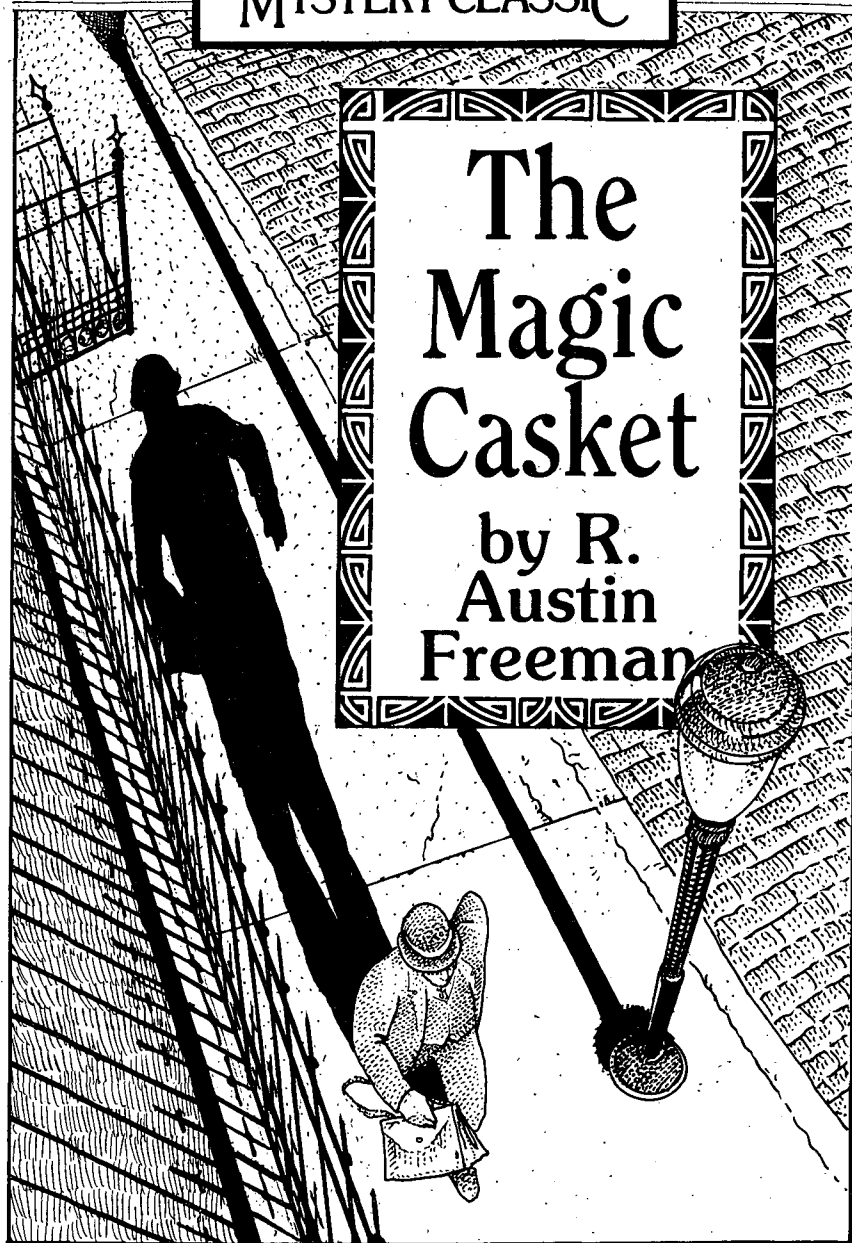


Illustration by Glenn Wolff

126

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was in the near neighborhood of King's Road, Chelsea, that chance, aided by Thorndyke's sharp and observant eyes, introduced us to the dramatic story of the Magic Casket. Not that there was anything strikingly dramatic in the opening phase of the affair, nor even in the story of the casket itself. It was Thorndyke who added the dramatic touch, and most of the magic, too; and I record the affair principally as an illustration of his extraordinary capacity for producing odd items of out of the way knowledge and instantly applying them in the most unexpected manner.

Eight o'clock had struck on a misty November night when we turned out of the main road, and, leaving behind the glare of the shop windows, plunged into the maze of dark and narrow streets to the north. The abrupt change impressed us both, and Thorndyke proceeded to moralize on it in his pleasant, reflective fashion.

"London is an inexhaustible place," he mused. "Its variety is infinite. A minute ago we walked in a glare of light, jostled by a multitude. And now look at this little street. It is as dim as a tunnel, and we have got it absolutely to ourselves. Anything might happen in a place like this."

Suddenly he stopped. We were, at the moment, passing a small church or chapel, the west door of which was enclosed in an open porch; and as my observant friend stepped into the latter and stooped, I perceived, in the deep shadow against the wall, the object which had evidently caught his eye.

"What is it?" I asked, following him in.

"It is a handbag," he replied; "and the question is, what is it doing here?"

He tried the church door, which was obviously locked, and coming out, looked at the windows.

"There are no lights in the church," said he; "the place is locked up, and there is nobody in sight. Apparently the bag is derelict. Shall we have a look at it?"

Without waiting for an answer, he picked it up and brought it out into the mitigated darkness of the street, where we proceeded to inspect it. But at the first glance it told its own tale; for it had evidently been locked, and it bore unmistakable traces of having been forced open.

"It isn't empty," said Thorndyke. "I think we had better see what is in it. Just catch hold while I get a light."

He handed me the bag while he felt in his pocket for the tiny electric lamp which he made a habit of carrying—and an excellent

Copyright 1924, 1925 by R. Austin Freeman. Reprinted by permission of A. P. Watt, Limited, on behalf of Winifred Lydia Briant.

habit it is. I held the mouth of the bag open while he illuminated the interior, which we then saw to be occupied by several objects neatly wrapped in brown paper. One of these Thorndyke lifted out, and untying the string and removing the paper, displayed a Chinese stoneware jar. Attached to it was a label, bearing the stamp of the Victoria and Albert Museum, on which was written:

"MISS MABEL BONNEY,
168 Willow Walk, Fulham Road, W."

"That tells us all that we want to know," said Thorndyke, re-wrapping the jar and tenderly replacing it in the bag. "We can't do wrong in delivering the things to their owner, especially as the bag itself is evidently her property, too," and he pointed to the gilt initials "M. B." stamped on the morocco.

It took us but a few minutes to reach the Fulham Road, but we then had to walk nearly a mile along that thoroughfare before we arrived at Willow Walk—to which an obliging shopkeeper had directed us—and, naturally, No. 168 was at the farther end.

As we turned into the quiet street we almost collided with two men, who were walking at a rapid pace, but both looking back over their shoulders. I noticed that they were both Japanese—well-dressed, gentlemanly-looking men—but I gave them little attention, being interested, rather, in what they were looking at. This was a taxicab which was dimly visible by the light of a street lamp at the farther end of the "Walk," and from which four persons alighted. Two of these had hurried ahead to knock at a door, while the other two walked very slowly across the pavement and up the steps to the threshold. Almost immediately the door was opened; two of the shadowy figures entered, and the other two returned slowly to the cab; and as we came nearer, I could see that these latter were policemen in uniform. I had just time to note this fact when they both got into the cab and were forthwith spirited away.

"Looks like a street accident of some kind," I remarked; and then, as I glanced at the number of the house we were passing, I added: "Now, I wonder if that house happens to be—yes, by Jove! it is. It is 168! Things have been happening, and this bag of ours is one of the *dramatis personæ*."

The response to our knock was by no means prompt. I was, in fact, in the act of raising my hand to the knocker to repeat the summons when the door opened and revealed an elderly servant-

maid, who regarded us inquiringly, and, as I thought, with something approaching alarm.

"Does Miss Mabel Bonney live here?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes, sir," was the reply; "but I am afraid you can't see her just now, unless it is something urgent. She is rather upset, and particularly engaged at present."

"There is no occasion whatever to disturb her," said Thorndyke. "We have merely called to restore this bag, which seemed to have been lost"; and with this he held it out towards her. She grasped it eagerly and as the mouth fell open, she peered into it.

"Why," she exclaimed, "they don't seem to have taken anything, after all. Where did you find it, sir?"

"In the porch of a church in Spelton Street," Thorndyke replied, and was turning away when the servant said earnestly:

"Would you kindly give me your name and address, sir? Miss Bonney will wish to write and thank you."

"There is really no need," said he; but she interrupted anxiously.

"If you would be so kind, sir. Miss Bonney will be so vexed if she is unable to thank you; and besides, she may want to ask you some questions about it."

"That is true," said Thorndyke (who was restrained only by good manners from asking one or two questions himself). He produced his card case, and having handed one of his cards to the maid, wished her "good evening" and retired.

"That bag had evidently been pinched," I remarked as we walked back towards the Fulham Road.

"Evidently," he agreed, and was about to enlarge on the matter when our attention was attracted to a taxi which was approaching from the direction of the main road. A man's head was thrust out of the window, and as the vehicle passed a street lamp, I observed that the head appertained to an elderly gentleman with very white hair and a very fresh-colored face.

"Did you see who that was?" Thorndyke asked.

"It looked like old Brodribb," I replied.

"It did; very much. I wonder where he is off to."

He turned and followed, with a speculative eye, the receding taxi, which presently swept alongside the curb and stopped, apparently opposite the house from which we had just come. As the vehicle came to rest, the door flew open and the passenger shot out like an elderly, but agile, Jack-in-the-box, and bounced up the steps.

"That is Brodribb's knock, sure enough," said I, as the old fashioned flourish reverberated up the quiet street. "I have heard it too often on our own knocker to mistake it. But we had better not let him see us watching him."

As we went once more on our way, I took a sly glance, now and again, at my friend, noting with a certain malicious enjoyment his profoundly cogitative air. I knew quite well what was happening in his mind; for his mind reacted to observed facts in an invariable manner. And here was a group of related facts: the bag, stolen but deposited intact; the museum label; the injured or sick person—probably Miss Bonney herself—brought home under police escort; and the arrival, post-haste, of the old lawyer; a significant group of facts. And there was Thorndyke, under my amused and attentive observation, fitting them together in various combinations to see what general conclusion emerged. Apparently my own mental state was equally clear to him, for he remarked, presently, as if replying to an unspoken comment:

"Well, I expect we shall know all about it before many days have passed if Brodribb sees my card, as he most probably will. Here comes an omnibus that will suit us. Shall we hop on?"

He stood at the curb and raised his stick; and as the accommodation on the omnibus was such that our seats were separated, there was no opportunity to pursue the subject further, even if there had been anything to discuss.

But Thorndyke's prediction was justified sooner than I had expected. For we had not long finished our supper, and had not yet closed the "oak," when there was heard a mighty flourish on the knocker of our inner door.

"Brodribb, by jingo!" I exclaimed, and hurried across the room to let him in.

"No, Jervis," he said as I invited him to enter, "I am not coming in. Don't want to disturb you at this time of night. I've just called to make an appointment for tomorrow with a client."

"Is the client's name Bonney?" I asked.

He started and gazed at me in astonishment. "Gad, Jervis," he exclaimed, "you are getting as bad as Thorndyke. How the deuce did you know that she was my client?"

"Never mind how I know. It is our business to know everything in these chambers. But if your appointment concerns Miss Mabel Bonney, for the Lord's sake come in and give Thorndyke a chance of a night's rest. At present he is on broken bottles, as Mr. Bumble would express it."

On this persuasion, Mr. Brodribb entered, nothing loath—very much the reverse, in fact—and having bestowed a jovial greeting on Thorndyke, glanced approvingly round the room.

"Ha!" said he, "you look very cosy. If you are really sure I am not—"

I cut him short by propelling him gently toward the fire, beside which I deposited him in an easy chair while Thorndyke pressed the electric bell which rang up in the laboratory.

"Well," said Brodribb, spreading himself out comfortably before the fire like a handsome old tomcat, "if you are going to let me give you a few particulars—but perhaps you would rather that I should not talk shop."

"Now you know perfectly well, Brodribb," said Thorndyke, "that 'shop' is the breath of life to us all. Let us have those particulars."

Brodribb sighed contentedly and placed his toes on the fender and at this moment the door opened softly and Polton looked into the room. He took a single, understanding glance at our visitor and withdrew, shutting the door without a sound.

"I am glad," pursued Brodribb, "to have this opportunity of a preliminary chat, because there are certain things that one can say better when the client is not present; and I am deeply interested in Miss Bonney's affairs. The crisis in those affairs which has brought me here is of quite recent date—in fact, it dates from this evening. But I know your partiality for having events related in their proper sequence, so I will leave today's happenings for the moment and tell you the story—the whole of which is material to the case—from the beginning."

Here there was a slight interruption, due to Polton's noiseless entry with a tray on which was a decanter, a biscuit box, and three port glasses. This he deposited on a small table, which he placed within convenient reach of our guest. Then, with a glance of altruistic satisfaction at our old friend, he stole out like a benevolent ghost.

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Brodribb, beaming on the decanter, "this is really too bad. You ought not to indulge me in this way."

"My dear Brodribb," replied Thorndyke, "you are a benefactor to us. You give us a pretext for taking a glass of port. We can't drink alone, you know."

"I should, if I had a cellar like yours," chuckled Brodribb, sniffing ecstatically at his glass. He took a sip, with his eyes closed, savored it solemnly, shook his head, and set the glass down on the table.

"To return to our case," he resumed, "Miss Bonney is the daugh-

ter of a solicitor, Harold Bonney—you may remember him. He had offices in Bedford Row; and there, one morning, a client came to him and asked him to take care of some property while he, the said client, ran over to Paris, where he had some urgent business. The property in question was a collection of pearls of most unusual size and value, forming a great necklace, which had been unstrung for the sake of portability. It is not clear where they came from, but as the transaction occurred soon after the Russian revolution, we may make a guess. At any rate, there they were, packed loosely in a leather bag, the string of which was sealed with the owner's seal.

"Bonney seems to have been rather casual about the affair. He gave the client a receipt for the bag, stating the nature of the contents, which he had not seen, and deposited it, in the client's presence, in the safe in his private office. Perhaps he intended to take it to the bank or transfer it to his strongroom, but it is evident that he did neither; for his managing clerk, who kept the second key of the strongroom—without which the room could not be opened—knew nothing of the transaction. When he went home at about seven o'clock, he left Bonney hard at work at his office, and there is no doubt that the pearls were still in the safe.

"That night, at about a quarter to nine, it happened that a couple of C.I.D. officers were walking up Bedford Row when they saw three men come out of one of the houses. Two of them turned up towards Theobald's Road, but the third came south, towards them. As he passed them, they both recognized him as a Japanese named Uyenishi who was believed to be a member of a cosmopolitan gang and whom the police were keeping under observation. Naturally their suspicions were aroused. The first two men had hurried round the corner and were out of sight; and when they turned to look after Uyenishi, he had mended his pace considerably and was looking back at them. Thereupon one of the officers, named Barker, decided to follow him while the other, Holt, reconnoitred the premises.

"Now, as soon as Barker turned, the Japanese broke into a run. It was just such a night as this: dark and slightly foggy. In order to keep his man in sight, Barker had to run, too; and he found that he had a sprinter to deal with. From the bottom of Bedford Row, Uyenishi darted across and shot down Hand Court like a lamp-lighter. Barker followed, but at the Holborn end his man was nowhere to be seen. However, he presently learned from a man at a

shop door that the fugitive had run past and turned up Brownlow Street, so off he went again in pursuit. But when he got to the top of the street, back in Bedford Row, he was gone. There was no sign of the man, and no one about from whom he could make inquiries. All he could do was to cross the road and walk up Bedford Row to see if Holt had made any discoveries.

"As he was trying to identify the house, his colleague came out onto the doorstep and beckoned him in; and this was the story that he told. He had recognized the house by the big lamp standard; and as the place was all dark, he had gone into the entry and tried the office door. Finding it unlocked, he had entered the clerks' office, lit the gas, and tried the door of the private office, but found it locked. He knocked at it but, getting no answer, had a good look around the clerks' office; and there, presently, on the floor in a dark corner, he found a key. This he tried in the door of the private office and, finding that it fitted, turned it and opened the door. As he did so, the light from the outer office fell on the body of a man lying on the floor just inside.

"A moment's inspection showed that the man had been murdered—first knocked on the head and then finished with a knife. Examination of the pockets showed that the dead man was Harold Bonney, and also that no robbery from the person seemed to have been committed. Nor was there any sign of any other kind of robbery. Nothing seemed to have been disturbed, and the safe had not been broken into, though that was not very conclusive, as the safe key was in the dead man's pocket. However, a murder had been committed, and obviously Uyenishi was either the murderer or an accessory; so Holt had, at once, rung up Scotland Yard on the office telephone, giving all the particulars.

"I may say at once that Uyenishi disappeared completely and at once. He never went to his lodgings at Limehouse, for the police were there before he could have arrived. A lively hue and cry was kept up. Photographs of the wanted man were posted outside every police station, and a watch was set at all the ports. But he was never found. He must have got away at once on some outward-bound tramp from the Thames. And there we will leave him for the moment.

"At first it was thought that nothing had been stolen, since the managing clerk could not discover that anything was missing. But a few days later the client returned from Paris and, presenting his receipt, asked for his pearls. But the pearls had vanished. Clearly

they had been the object of the crime. The robbers must have known about them and traced them to the office. Of course the safe had been opened with its own key, which was then replaced in the dead man's pocket.

"Now, I was poor Bonney's executor, and in that capacity I denied his liability in respect of the pearls on the ground that he was a gratuitous bailee—there being no evidence that any consideration had been demanded—and that being murdered cannot be construed as negligence. But Miss Mabel, who was practically the sole legatee, insisted on accepting liability. She said that the pearls could have been secured in the bank or the strongroom, and that she was morally, if not legally, liable for their loss; and she insisted on handing to the owner the full amount at which he valued them. It was a wildly foolish proceeding, for he would certainly have accepted half the sum. But still, I take my hat off to a person—man or woman—who can accept poverty in preference to a broken covenant"; and here Brodribb, being in fact that sort of person himself, had to be consoled with a replenished glass.

"And mind you," he resumed, "when I speak of poverty, I wish to be taken literally. The estimated value of those pearls was fifty thousand pounds—if you can image anyone out of Bedlam giving such a sum for a parcel of trash like that; and when poor Mabel Bonney had paid it, she was left with the prospect of having to spread her butter mighty thin for the rest of her life. As a matter of fact, she has had to sell one after another of her little treasures to pay just her current expenses, and I'm hanged if I can see how she is going to carry on when she has sold the last of them. But there, I mustn't take up your time with her private troubles. Let us return to our muttons.

"First, as to the pearls. They were never traced, and it seems probable that they were never disposed of. For, you see, pearls are different from any other kind of gem. You can cut up a big diamond, but you can't cut up a big pearl. And the great value of this necklace was due not only to the size, the perfect shape and 'orient' of the separate pearls, but to the fact that the whole set was perfectly matched. To break up the necklace was to destroy a good part of its value.

"And now as to our friend Uyenishi. He disappeared, as I have said; but he reappeared at Los Angeles, in custody of the police, charged with robbery and murder. He was taken redhanded and was duly convicted and sentenced to death; but for some reason—or

more probably, for no reason, as we should think—the sentence was commuted to imprisonment for life. Under these circumstances, the English police naturally took no action, especially as they really had no evidence against him.

“Now Uyenishi was, by trade, a metalworker; a maker of those pretty trifles that are so dear to the artistic Japanese, and when he was in prison he was allowed to set up a little workshop and practice his trade on a small scale. Among other things that he made was a little casket in the form of a seated figure, which he said he wanted to give to his brother as a keepsake. I don’t know whether any permission was granted for him to make this gift, but that is of no consequence; for Uyenishi got influenza and was carried off in a few days by pneumonia; and the prison authorities learned that his brother had been killed, a week or two previously, in a shooting affair in San Francisco. So the casket remained on their hands.

“About this time, Miss Bonney was invited to accompany an American lady on a visit to California, and accepted gratefully. While she was there she paid a visit to the prison to inquire whether Uyenishi had ever made any kind of statement concerning the missing pearls. Here she heard of Uyenishi’s recent death; and the governor of the prison, as he could not give her any information, handed over to them the casket as a sort of memento. This transaction came to the knowledge of the press, and well, you know what the Californian press is like. There were ‘some comments,’ as they would say, and quite an assortment of Japanese, of shady antecedents, applied at the prison to have the casket ‘restored’ to them as Uyenishi’s heirs. Then Miss Bonney’s rooms at the hotel were raided by burglars—but the casket was in the hotel strong-room—and Miss Bonney and her hostess were shadowed by various undesirables in such a disturbing fashion that the two ladies became alarmed and secretly made their way to New York. But there another burglary occurred, with the same unsuccessful result, and the shadowing began again. Finally, Miss Bonney, feeling that her presence was a danger to her friend, decided to return to England, and managed to get on board ship without letting her departure be known in advance.

“But even in England she has not been left in peace. She has had an uncomfortable feeling of being watched and attended, and has seemed to be constantly meeting Japanese men in the streets, especially in the vicinity of her house. Of course all the fuss is

about this infernal casket; and when she told me what was happening, I promptly popped the thing in my pocket and took it to my office, where I stowed it in the strongroom. And there, of course, it ought to have remained. But it didn't. One day Miss Bonney told me that she was sending some small things to a loan exhibition of Oriental works of art at the South Kensington Museum, and she wished to include the casket. I urged her strongly to do nothing of the kind, but she persisted; and the end of it was that we went to the museum together, with her pottery and stuff in a handbag and the casket in my pocket.

"It was a most imprudent thing to do, for there the beastly casket was, for several months, exposed in a glass case for anyone to see, with her name on the label; and what was worse, full particulars of the origin of the thing. However, nothing happened while it was there—the museum is not an easy place to steal from—and all went well until it was time to remove the things after the close of the exhibition. Now, today was the appointed day, and, as on the previous occasion, she and I went to the museum together. But the unfortunate thing is that we didn't come away together. Her other exhibits were all pottery, and these were dealt with first, so that she had her handbag packed and was ready to go before they had begun on the metalwork cases. As we were not going the same way, it didn't seem necessary for her to wait; so she went off with her bag and I stayed behind until the casket was released, when I put it in my pocket and went home, where I locked the thing up again in the strongroom.

"It was about seven when I got home. A little after eight I heard the telephone ring down in the office, and down I went, cursing the untimely ringer, who turned out to be a policeman at St. George's Hospital. He said he had found Miss Bonney lying unconscious in the street and had taken her to the hospital, where she had been detained for a while, but she was now recovered and he was taking her home. She would like me, if possible, to go and see her at once. Well, of course, I set off forthwith and got to her house a few minutes after her arrival, and just after you had left.

"She was a good deal upset, so I didn't worry her with many questions, but she gave me a short account of her misadventure, which amounted to this: She had started to walk home from the museum along the Brompton Road, and she was passing down a quiet street between that and Fulham Road when she heard soft footsteps behind her. The next moment a scarf or shawl was thrown

around her head and drawn tightly round her neck. At the same moment, the bag was snatched from her hand. That is all that she remembers, for she was half-suffocated and so terrified that she fainted, and knew no more until she found herself in a cab with two policemen, who were taking her to the hospital.

"Now it is obvious that her assailants were in search of that damned casket, for the bag had been broken open and searched, but nothing taken or damaged; which suggests the Japanese again, for a British thief would have smashed the crockery. I found your card there, and I put it to Miss Bonney that we had better ask you to help us—I told her all about you—and she agreed emphatically. So that is why I am here, drinking your port and robbing you of your night's rest."

"And what do you want me to do?" Thorndyke asked.

"Whatever you think best," was the cheerful reply. "In the first place, this nuisance must be put a stop to—this shadowing and hanging about. But apart from that, you must see that there is something queer about this accursed casket. The beastly thing is of no intrinsic value. The museum man turned up his nose at it. But it evidently has some extrinsic value, and no small value either. If it is good enough for these devils to follow it all the way from the States, as they seem to have done, it is good enough for us to try to find out what its value is. That is where you come in. I propose to bring Miss Bonney to see you tomorrow, and I will bring the infernal casket, too. Then you will ask her a few questions, take a look at the casket—through the microscope, if necessary—and tell us all about it in your usual necromantic way."

Thorndyke laughed as he refilled our friend's glass. "If faith will move mountains, Brodribb," said he, "you ought to have been a civil engineer. But it is certainly a rather intriguing problem."

"Ha!" exclaimed the old solicitor; "then it's all right. I've known you a good many years, but I've never known you to be stumped; and you are not going to be stumped now. What time shall I bring her? Afternoon or evening would suit her best."

"Very well," replied Thorndyke; "bring her to tea—say, five o'clock. How will that do?"

"Excellently; and here's good luck to the adventure." He drained his glass, and the decanter being now empty, he rose, shook our hands warmly, and took his departure in high spirits.

It was with a very lively interest that I looked forward to the prospective visit. Like Thorndyke, I found the case rather intri-

guing. For it was quite clear, as our shrewd old friend had said, that there was something more than met the eye in the matter of this casket. Hence, on the following afternoon, when, on the stroke of five, footsteps became audible on our stairs, I awaited the arrival of our new client with keen curiosity, both as to herself and her mysterious property.

To tell the truth, the lady was better worth looking at than the casket. At the first glance, I was strongly prepossessed in her favor, and so, I think, was Thorndyke. Not that she was a beauty, though comely enough. But she was an example of a type that seems to be growing rarer: quiet, gentle, soft-spoken, and a lady to her fingertips; a little sad-faced and careworn, with a streak or two of white in her prettily-disposed black hair, though she could not have been much over thirty-five. Altogether a very gracious and winning personality.

When we had been presented to her by Brodribb—who treated her as if she had been a royal personage—and had enthroned her in the most comfortable easy chair, we inquired as to her health, and were duly thanked for the salvage of the bag. Then Polton brought in the tray, with an air that seemed to demand an escort of choristers, the tea was poured out, and the informal proceedings began.

She had not, however, much to tell; for she had not seen her assailants, and the essential facts of the case had been fully presented in Brodribb's excellent summary. After a very few questions, therefore, we came to the next stage; which was introduced by Brodribb's taking from his pocket a small parcel which he proceeded to open.

"There," said he, "that is the *fons et origo mali*. Not much to look at, I think you will agree." He set the object down on the table and glared at it malevolently, while Thorndyke and I regarded it with a more impersonal interest. It was not much to look at. Just an ordinary Japanese casket in the form of a squat, shapeless figure with a silly little grinning face, of which the head and shoulders opened on a hinge; a pleasant enough object, with its quiet, warm coloring, but certainly not a masterpiece of art.

Thorndyke picked it up and turned it over slowly for a preliminary inspection; then he went on to examine it detail by detail, watched closely, in his turn, by Brodribb and me. Slowly and methodically, his eye—fortified by a watchmaker's eyeglass—traveled over every part of the exterior. Then he opened it and, having examined the inside of the lid, scrutinized the bottom from within,

long and attentively. Finally, he turned the casket upside down and examined the bottom from without, giving to it the longest and most rigorous inspection of all—which puzzled me somewhat, for the bottom was absolutely plain. At length, he passed the casket and the eyeglass to me without comment.

"Well," said Brodribb, "what is the verdict?"

"It is of no value as a work of art," replied Thorndyke. "The body and lid are just castings of common white metal—an antimony alloy, I should say. The bronze color is lacquer."

"So the museum man remarked," said Brodribb.

"But," continued Thorndyke, "there is one very odd thing about it. The only piece of fine metal in it is in the part which matters least. The bottom is a separate plate of the alloy known to the Japanese as shakudo—an alloy of copper and gold."

"Yes," said Brodribb, "the museum man noted that, too, and couldn't make out why it had been put there."

"Then," Thorndyke continued, "there is another anomalous feature; the inside of the bottom is covered with elaborate decoration—just the place where decoration is most inappropriate, since it would be covered up by the contents of the casket. And, again, this decoration is etched; not engraved or chased. But etching is a very unusual process for this purpose, if it is ever used at all by Japanese metalworkers. My impression is that it is not; for it is most unsuitable for decorative purposes. That is all that I observe, so far."

"And what do you infer from your observations?" Brodribb asked.

"I should like to think the matter over," was the reply. "There is an obvious anomaly, which must have some significance. But I won't embark on speculative opinions at this stage. I should like, however, to take one or two photographs of the casket, for reference; but that will occupy some time. You will hardly want to wait so long."

"No," said Brodribb. "But Miss Bonney is coming with me to my office to go over some documents and discuss a little business. When we have finished, I will come back and fetch the confounded thing."

"There is no need for that," replied Thorndyke. "As soon as I have done what is necessary, I will bring it up to your place."

To this arrangement Brodribb agreed readily, and he and his client prepared to depart. I rose, too, and as I happened to have a call to make in Old Square, Lincoln's Inn, I asked permission to walk with them.

As we came out into King's Bench Walk I noticed a smallish,

gentlemanly-looking man who had just passed our entry and now turned in at the one next door; and by the light of the lamp in the entry he looked to me like a Japanese. I thought Miss Bonney had observed him, too, but she made no remark, and neither did I. But, passing up Inner Temple Lane, we nearly overtook two other men, who—though I got but a back view of them and the light was feeble enough—aroused my suspicions by their neat, small figures. As we approached, they quickened their pace, and one of them looked back over his shoulder; and then my suspicions were confirmed, for it was an unmistakable Japanese face that looked around at us. Miss Bonney saw that I had observed the men, for she remarked, as they turned sharply at the Cloisters and entered Pump Court:

"You see, I am still haunted by Japanese."

"I noticed them," said Brodribb. "They are probably law students. But we may as well be companionable"; and with this, he, too, headed for Pump Court.

We followed our Oriental friends across the Lane into Fountain Court, and through that and Devereux Court out to Temple Bar, where we parted from them; they turning westward and we crossing to Bell Yard, up which we walked, entering New Square by the Carey Street gate. At Brodribb's doorway we halted and looked back, but no one was in sight. I accordingly went my way, promising to return anon to hear Thorndyke's report, and the lawyer and his client disappeared through the portal.

My business occupied me longer than I had expected, but nevertheless, when I arrived at Brodribb's premises—where he lived in chambers over his office—Thorndyke had not yet made his appearance. A quarter of an hour later, however, we heard his brisk step on the stairs, and as Brodribb threw the door open, he entered and produced the casket from his pocket.

"Well," said Brodribb, taking it from him and locking it, for the time being, in a drawer, "has the oracle spoken; and if so, what did he say?"

"Oracles," replied Thorndyke, "have a way of being more concise than explicit. Before I attempt to interpret the message, I should like to view the scene of the escape; to see if there was any intelligible reason why this man, Uyenishi, should have returned up Brownlow Street into what must have been the danger zone. I think that is a material question."

"Then," said Brodribb, with evident eagerness, "let us all walk up and have a look at the confounded place. It is quite close by."

We all agreed instantly, two of us, at least, being on the tiptoe of expectation. For Thorndyke, who habitually understated his results, had virtually admitted that the casket had told him something; and as we walked up the Square to the gate in Lincoln's Inn Fields, I watched him furtively, trying to gather from his impassive face a hint as to what the something amounted to, and wondering how the movements of the fugitive bore on the solution of the mystery. Brodribb was similarly occupied, and as we crossed from Great Turnstile and took our way up Brownlow Street, I could see that his excitement was approaching the bursting point.

At the top of the street Thorndyke paused and looked up and down the rather dismal thoroughfare which forms a continuation of Bedford Row and bears its name. Then he crossed to the paved island surrounding the pump which stands in the middle of the road, and from thence surveyed the entrances to Brownlow Street and Hand Court; and then he turned and looked thoughtfully at the pump.

"A quaint old survivor, this," he remarked, tapping the iron bell with his knuckles. "There is a similar one, you may remember, in Queen Square, and another at Aldgate. But that is still in use."

"Yes," Brodribb assented, almost dancing with impatience and inwardly damning the pump, as I could see. "I've noticed it."

"I suppose," Thorndyke proceeded, in a reflective tone, "they had to remove the handle. But it was rather a pity."

"Perhaps it was," growled Brodribb, whose complexion was rapidly developing affinities to that of a pickled cabbage, "but what the d—"

Here he broke off short and glared silently at Thorndyke, who had raised his arm and squeezed his hand into the opening once occupied by the handle. He groped in the interior with an expression of placid interest, and presently reported, "The barrel is still there, and so, apparently, is the plunger—" (Here I heard Brodribb mutter huskily, "Damn the barrel and the plunger too!") "but my hand is rather large for the exploration. Would you, Miss Bonney, mind slipping your hand in and telling me if I am right?"

We all gazed at Thorndyke in dismay, but in a moment Miss Bonney recovered from her astonishment, and with a deprecating smile, half shy, half amused, she slipped off her glove, and reaching up—it was rather high for her—inserted her hand into the narrow slit. Brodribb glared at her and gobbled like a turkeycock, and I watched her with a sudden suspicion that something was going to

happen. Nor was I mistaken. For, as I looked, the shy, puzzled smile faded from her face and was succeeded by an expression of incredulous astonishment. Slowly she withdrew her hand, and as it came out of the slit it dragged something after it. I started forward, and by the light of the lamp above the pump I could see that the object was a leather bag secured by a string from which hung a broken seal.

"It can't be!" she gasped as, with trembling fingers, she untied the string. Then, as she peered into the open mouth, she uttered a little cry.

"It is! It is! It is the necklace!"

Brodrigg was speechless with amazement. So was I; and I was still gazing open-mouthed at the bag in Miss Bonney's hands when I felt Thorndyke touch my arm. I turned quickly and found him offering me an automatic pistol.

"Stand by, Jervis," he said quietly, looking towards Gray's Inn.

I looked in the same direction, and then perceived three men stealing round the corner from Jockey's Fields. Brodrigg saw them, too, and snatching the bag of pearls from his client's hands, buttoned it into his breast pocket and placed himself before its owner, grasping his stick with a warlike air. The three men filed along the pavement until they were opposite us, when they turned simultaneously and bore down on the pump, each man, as I noticed, holding his right hand behind him. In a moment, Thorndyke's hand, grasping a pistol, flew up—as did mine, also—and he called out sharply:

"Stop! If any moves a hand, I fire."

The challenge brought them up short, evidently unprepared for this kind of reception. What would have happened next it is impossible to guess. But at this moment a police whistle sounded and two constables ran out from Hand Court. The whistle was instantly echoed from the direction of Warwick Court, whence two more constabulary figures appeared through the postern gate of Gray's Inn. Our three attendants hesitated but for an instant. Then, with one accord, they turned tail and flew like the wind round into Jockey's Fields, with the whole posse of constables close on their heels.

"Remarkable coincidence," said Brodrigg, "that those policemen should happen to be on the lookout. Or isn't it a coincidence?"

"I telephoned to the station superintendent before I started," replied Thorndyke, "warning him of a possible breach of the peace at this spot."

Brodrribb chuckled. "You're a wonderful man, Thorndyke. You think of everything. I wonder if the police will catch those fellows."

"It is no concern of ours," replied Thorndyke. "We've got the pearls, and that finishes the business. There will be no more shadowing, in any case."

Miss Bonney heaved a comfortable little sigh and glanced gratefully at Thorndyke. "You can have no idea what a relief that is!" she exclaimed; "to say nothing of the treasure-trove."

We waited some time, but as neither the fugitives nor the constables reappeared, we presently made our way back down Brownlow Street. And there it was that Brodrribb had an inspiration.

"I'll tell you what," said he. "I will just pop these things in my strongroom—they will be perfectly safe there until the bank opens tomorrow—and then we'll go and have a nice little dinner. I'll pay the piper."

"Indeed you won't!" exclaimed Miss Bonney. "This is my thanksgiving festival, and the benevolent wizard shall be the guest of the evening."

"Very well, my dear," agreed Brodrribb. "I will pay and charge it to the estate. But I stipulate that the benevolent wizard shall tell us exactly what the oracle said. That is essential to the preservation of my sanity."

"You shall have his *ipsissima verba*," Thorndyke promised; and the resolution was carried, *nem. con.*

An hour and a half later we were seated around a table in a private room of a cafe to which Mr. Brodrribb had conducted us. I may not divulge its whereabouts, though I may, perhaps, hint that we approached it by way of Wardour Street. At any rate, we had dined, even to the fulfillment of Brodrribb's ideal, and coffee and liqueurs furnished a sort of gastronomic doxology. Brodrribb had lighted a cigar and Thorndyke had produced a vicious-looking little black cheroot, which he regarded fondly and then returned to its abiding place as unsuited to the present company.

"Now," said Brodrribb, watching Thorndyke fill his pipe (as understudy of the cheroot aforesaid), "we are waiting to hear the words of the oracle."

"You shall hear them," Thorndyke replied. "There were only five of them. But first, there are certain introductory matters to be disposed of. The solution of this problem is based on two well-known physical facts, one metallurgical and the other optical."

"Ha!" said Brodrribb. "But you must temper the wind to the shorn lamb, you know, Thorndyke. Miss Bonney and I are not scientists."

"I will put the matter quite simply, but you must have the facts. The first relates to the properties of malleable metals—excepting iron and steel—and especially of copper and its alloys. If a plate of such metal or alloy—say, bronze, for instance—is made red-hot and quenched in water, it becomes quite soft and flexible—the reverse of what happens in the case of iron. Now, if such a plate of softened metal be placed on a steel anvil and hammered, it becomes extremely hard and brittle."

"I follow that," said Brodribb.

"Then see what follows. If, instead of hammering the soft plate, you put on it the edge of a blunt chisel and strike on that chisel a sharp blow, you produce an indented line. Now the plate remains soft; but the metal forming the indented line has been hammered and has become hard. There is now a line of hard metal on the soft plate. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly," replied Brodribb; and Thorndyke accordingly continued:

"The second fact is this: if a beam of light falls on a polished surface which reflects it, and if that surface is turned through a given angle, the beam of light is deflected through double that angle."

"H'm!" grunted Brodribb. "Yes. No doubt. I hope we are not going to get into any deeper waters, Thorndyke."

"We are not," replied the latter, smiling urbanely. "We are now going to consider the application of these facts. Have you ever seen a Japanese magic mirror?"

"Never, nor even heard of such a thing."

"They are bronze mirrors, just like the ancient Greek or Etruscan mirrors—which are probably 'magic' mirrors, too. A typical specimen consists of a circular or oval plate of bronze, highly polished on the face and decorated on the back with chased ornament—commonly a dragon or some such device—and furnished with a handle. The ornament is, as I have said, chased; that is to say, it is executed in indented lines made with chasing tools, which are, in effect, small chisels, more or less blunt, which are struck with a chasing hammer.

"Now these mirrors have a very singular property. Although the face is perfectly plain, as a mirror should be, yet, if a beam of sunlight is caught on it and reflected, say, on to a white wall, the round or oval patch of light on the wall is not a plain light patch. It shows quite clearly the ornament on the back of the mirror."

"But how extraordinary!" exclaimed Miss Bonney. "It sounds quite incredible."

"It does," Thorndyke agreed. "And yet the explanation is quite simple. Professor Sylvanus Thompson pointed it out years ago. It is based on the facts which I have just stated to you. The artist who makes one of these mirrors begins, naturally, by annealing the metal until it is quite soft. Then he chases the design on the back, and this design then shows slightly on the face. But he now grinds the face perfectly flat with fine emery and water so that the traces of the design are completely obliterated. Finally, he polishes the face with rouge on a soft buff.

"But now observe that wherever the chasing tool has made a line, the metal is hardened right through, so that the design is in hard metal on a soft matrix. But the hardened metal resists the wear of the polishing buff more than the soft metal does. The result is that the act of polishing causes the design to appear in faint relief on the face. Its projection is infinitesimal—less than the hundred-thousandth of an inch—and totally invisible to the eye. But, minute as it is, owing to the optical law which I mentioned—which, in effect, doubles the projection—it is enough to influence the reflection of light. As a consequence, every chased line appears on the patch of light as a dark line with a bright border, and so the whole design is visible. I think that is quite clear."

"Perfectly clear," Miss Bonney and Brodribb agreed.

"But now," pursued Thorndyke, "before we come to the casket, there is a very curious corollary which I must mention. Suppose our artist, having finished the mirror, should proceed with a scraper to erase the design from the back; and on the blank, scraped surface to etch a new design. The process of etching does not harden the metal, so the new design does not appear on the reflection. But the old design would. For although it was invisible on the face and had been erased from the back, it would still exist in the substance of the metal and continue to influence the reflection. The odd result would be that the design which would be visible in the patch of light on the wall would be a different one from that on the back of the mirror.

"No doubt you see what I am leading up to. But I will take the investigation of the casket as it actually occurred. It was obvious, at once, that the value of the thing was extrinsic. It had no intrinsic value, either in material or workmanship. What could that value be? The clear suggestion was that the casket was the vehicle of

some secret message or information. It had been made by Uyenishi, who had almost certainly had possession of the missing pearls, and who had been so closely pursued that he never had an opportunity to communicate with his confederates. It was to be given to a man who was almost certainly one of those confederates; and, since the pearls had never been traced, there was a distinct possibility that the (presumed) message referred to some hiding place in which Uyenishi had concealed them during his flight, and where they were probably still hidden.

"With these considerations in my mind, I examined the casket, and this was what I found. The thing itself was a common white metal casting, made presentable by means of lacquer. But the white metal bottom had been cut out and replaced by a plate of fine bronze—shakudo. The inside of this was covered with an etched design, which immediately aroused my suspicions. Turning it over, I saw that the outside of the bottom was not only smooth and polished; it was a true mirror. It gave a perfectly undistorted reflection of my face. At once, I suspected that the mirror held the secret; that the message, whatever it was, had been chased on the back, had then been scraped away and an etched design worked on it to hide the traces of the scraper.

"As soon as you were gone, I took the casket up to the laboratory and threw a strong beam of parallel light from a condenser on the bottom, catching the reflection on a sheet of white paper. The result was just what I had expected. On the bright oval patch on the paper could be seen the shadowy, but quite distinct, forms of five words in the Japanese character.

"I was in somewhat of a dilemma, for I have no knowledge of Japanese, whereas the circumstances were such as to make it rather unsafe to employ a translator. However, as I do just know the Japanese characters and possess a Japanese dictionary, I determined to make an attempt to fudge out the words myself. If I failed, I could then look for a discreet translator.

"However, it proved to be easier than I had expected, for the words were detached; they did not form a sentence, and so involved no questions of grammar. I spelt out the first word and then looked it up in the dictionary. The translation was 'pearls.' This looked hopeful, and I went on to the next, of which the translation was 'pump.' The third word floored me. It seemed to be 'jokkis,' or 'jokkish,' but there was no such word in the dictionary; so I turned to the next word, hoping that it would explain its predecessor. And

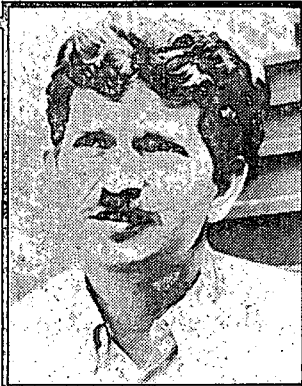
it did. The fourth word was 'fields,' and the last word was evidently 'London.' So the entire group read: 'Pearls, Pump, Jokkis, Fields, London.'

"Now, there is no pump, so far as I know, in Jockey's Fields, but there is one in Bedford Row close to the corner of the Fields, and exactly opposite the end of Brownlow Street. And by Mr. Brodribb's account, Uyenishi, in his flight, ran down Hand Court and returned up Brownlow Street, as if he were making for the pump. As the latter is disused and the handle-hole is high up, well out of the way of children, it offers quite a good temporary hiding place, and I had no doubt that the bag of pearls had been poked into it and was probably there still. I was tempted to go at once and explore; but I was anxious that the discovery should be made by Miss Bonney herself, and I did not dare to make a preliminary exploration for fear of being shadowed. If I had found the treasure I should have had to take it and give it to her, which would have been a flat ending to the adventure. So I had to dissemble and be the occasion of much smothered objurgation on the part of my friend Brodribb. And that is the whole story of my interview with the oracle."

Our mantelpiece is becoming a veritable museum of trophies of victory, the gifts of grateful clients. Among them is a squat, shapeless figure of a Japanese gentleman of the old school, with a silly, grinning little face—the Magic Casket. But its possession is no longer a menace. Its sting has been drawn; its magic is exploded; its secret is exposed, and its glory departed.

BOOKED & PRINTED

by Carol Harper



STUART KAMINSKY

Carol Stingo

Chief Inspector Porfiry Petrovich Rostnikov lives with his wife Sarah on the sixth floor of an anonymous apartment block on Krasnikov Street, a building with no elevator. Few buildings in Moscow have elevators, and this is inconvenient to a fifty-five-year-old man whose leg was essentially immobilized in the Battle of Rostov, but the chief inspector is a typical Moscow native. He takes this obstacle as routine, enduring the pain it often causes. Rostnikov works for the Deputy Procurator of Moscow, Anna Timofeyeva, as do a number of other military police. Rostnikov; his colleagues Emiol Karpo and Sasha Tkach; various other less competent policemen, including Colonel Snitkonoy of the MVD; Timo-

feyeva and her successor, Khabolov; and officials of the KGB populate Stuart Kaminsky's series about the Russian police.

Rostnikov is short and broad, built like a washtub, which is his nickname among the police. He practices lifting weights in his small apartment and often wishes for a better, more complete set. One of the highlights of his life was winning the senior weight lifting contest in Moscow, where he got to meet an idol, Olympic champion Alexyev. This weight lifting has also helped him on the job, since he can defend himself against the largest and most agile of villains by dint of his brute strength.

Rostnikov can speak some English, which he has polished from the reading of black mar-

ket copies of American mysteries, especially Ed McBain's 87th Precinct series. He often wishes he could visit Isola and meet Carella and the rest of that fascinating group of policemen who do not have to labor under the burdens he carries: they do not have to deal with the politics of Russia, where cases are dismissed for personal or political expediency and where the KGB is constantly interfering. They are not suspect because they are good at their jobs, nor are they persecuted because of race or religion. Rostnikov is always aware of these burdens, since he often solves cases better left unsolved and made the political mistake of marrying a Jewish woman who, as the series progresses, pressures her husband into considering emigration. He has a son, Josef, who is in the army and is often being sent to Afghanistan by the KGB as a means of controlling Rostnikov.

Anna Timofeyeva is a dedicated bureaucrat who works eighteen-hour days without really clearing her desk of the many cases procurators must handle in Russia. She respects Rostnikov, but suspects him of being less than loyal to the concepts of the state and more interested in being a good policeman. She is eventually replaced by the incompetent but political Khabolov.

Rostnikov's colleagues each has a case load approximating

the impossible, and each ends up working with Rostnikov on a central mystery, usually involving a murder. Emil Karpo is a spare, pale man (nicknamed the Vampire) who suffers from migraines and who never quits on a case. He keeps notebooks on all his investigations and pursues them on his own time with a dogged patience derived from a complete belief in the Revolution.

Sasha Tkach, nicknamed the Innocent, is a young, goodlooking man, married and living in a two room apartment with his wife and deaf mother. He would dearly love to have a larger place for privacy and to escape his mother, but he doesn't make enough money to pay the necessary bribes. He is not a particularly brilliant policeman and often makes mistakes, but Rostnikov knows how to use him effectively.

The demon in Rostnikov's life is Colonel Drozhkin of the KGB. It is Drozhkin who is always having Josef Rostnikov reassigned, who is always taking Rostnikov off cases, and who eventually has him demoted from the procurator's office to the MVD under Colonel Snitkonoy when Rostnikov tries to blackmail his way into an exit visa. Drozhkin is old, a survivor of various purges, but even he is dispensable, so when he is diagnosed as having cancer, he is replaced by the equally un-

likable Major Zhenya.

Kaminsky's series is loaded with atmosphere, and each character is well-drawn. Time passes and things change in the lives of each character, and they are enlivened by these changes. Even the villains and minor functionaries are alive; the motivations of a people under a completely different political and cultural system are not hard to understand from the settings and characterizations in this series. There are

currently five books: *Death of a Dissident* (1981; also published as *Rostnikov's Corpse*), Edgar nominee *Black Knight in Red Square* (1984), *Red Chameleon* (1985), *A Fine Red Rain* (1987), and Edgar winner *A Cold Red Sunrise* (Scribners, \$15.95, 1988). Most have been reprinted in paperback by Ivy Books, and all should be readily available to the reader who likes believable police procedurals with an exotic, albeit depressing locale.

MYSTERY REVIEWS

T.S.W. Sheridan's Uncle Charlie has been murdered. Uncle Charlie was the family black sheep, and Sheridan has been fascinated with him most of his life; when he finds that Uncle Charlie has willed him his lakeside property in the New York Finger Lakes wine country, Sheridan takes advantage of being on the scene to investigate his uncle's death. Stephen F. Wilcox's **The Dry White Tear** (St. Martin's, \$15.95, 217 pp) places a freelance investigative reporter in the role of amateur detective, assisted by the local newspaper editor and the under-sheriff of the county.

Robert Barnard is back, with Charlie Peace, a black CID officer, helping out Superintendent Iain Dundy in the investigation of the murder of a particularly loathsome Australian inn manager. Surrounding this murder are a number of actors, opera stars, orchestra members, and other "artsy" types which Dundy dreads. The only thing worse would be foreigners, and some of these artsy types are *also* foreign! **Death and the Chaste Apprentice** (Scribners, \$17.95, 211 pp) sets murder in between the revival of a fictional Elizabethan play and a newly discovered version of a justly lost Donizetti opera at an arts festival just outside London.

James Lee Burke brings back his ex-New Orleans homicide cop, Dave Robichaux, in **Black Cherry Blues** (Little, Brown, \$17.45, 304 pp), a story which takes the Cajun on a tour of Montana and his own mind. Dave is still not over the murder of his wife and, it seems, the long-ago death of his father. These two, along with various Vietnam veterans, haunt Robichaux's dreams from some deep watery place his mind associates with his alcoholism and

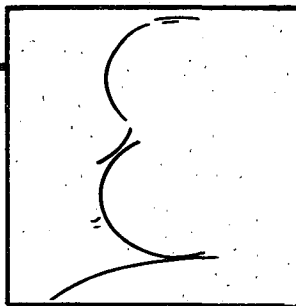
some self-destructive characteristics which not only drove him away from being a cop but also from a normal life. His only hold on reality seems to be Alafair, his "adopted" Central American refugee daughter, and the bait shop he runs in New Iberia Parish, Louisiana. When an old college buddy and Dave's crooked ex-partner appear in town, Dave finds himself framed for murder; his only solution is to follow this unlikely pair to Montana where both work for a minor Mafia kingpin. Despite the unlikely coincidence of two old, unconnected friends' working for the same criminal boss, the characterizations of these two "friends," Robichaux and his child, a DEA cop, and a parochial school principal in Montana are excellent, and the tastes of Cajun Louisiana and Indian Country in Montana make the book worth a read.

SOLUTION TO THE JANUARY "UNSOLVED":

1. Yes.
 2. Yes, judging by the patio equipment.
 3. Yes, because there are just two settings and two chairs.
 4. Yes. Judging by the pattern of shards, the plate was thrown at the chair.
 5. At the TV.
 6. No. They sat almost back to back and far from each other until she went to the grill, and he had his own portable TV which he'd been looking at. They seemed to have nothing in common except the need to eat.
 7. Hers.
 8. Yes, because her glass stands next to the steak and her fingerprints are on the carving knife.
 9. No. The position of her thumbprint and fingerprints indicates that she was carving with the knife, which requires a sawing stroke, rather than grip-
- ping it for the downward motion of stabbing.
10. The Beans had an argument and she lost her temper, threw a plate at him, and then ran off in a huff. That much of Arnold Bean's story is true. But after his wife left, Bean decided to accuse her of trying to stab him. He tore his shirt at the shoulder and called the police, hoping all this would stand him in good stead when the inevitable divorce suit was filed.
- Lily should exonerate Mrs. Bean and accuse Bean of falsely charging a crime.
- However, aware that Arnold Bean was politically influential, she did nothing. As a result, within a month she was promoted to detective, first grade, where she used her talents to the full.

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by William Heller



An *Innocent Man* is yet another variation on Hitchcock's favored theme, the story of an average Joe accused of a crime he did not commit. In this case, solid citizen Jimmie Rainwood (Tom Selleck), a hardworking airline mechanic, ends up in a state penitentiary after a couple of crooked narcotics cops, with the wrong address, enter his house, shoot and wound him, and plant drugs on him to cover their tracks. Self-defense, they claim.

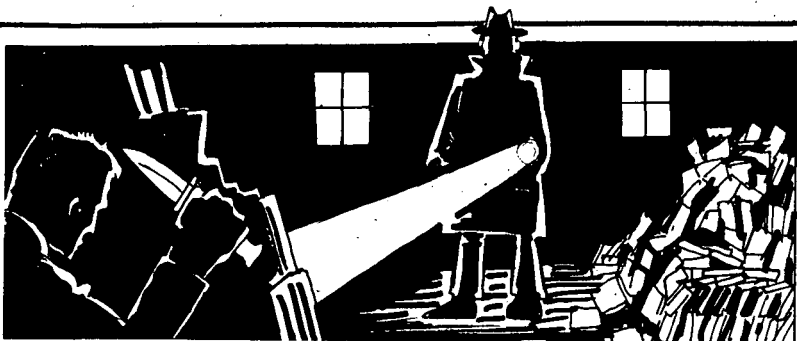
After what seems like a particularly perfunctory trial which features quite obvious perjury, Rainwood is hauled off to jail while his pretty young wife Kate (Laila Robins) yells that she'll do all she can to free him. He yells back that he loves her. It's not exactly chilling or even stirring stuff.

The verdict is appealed but upheld, and *An Innocent Man*, unfortunately, degenerates into

a Sylvester Stallone-type prison flick with such issues as prison rape, inmate gangs, and the like all brought up. After some run-ins with Jingles (Bruce Young), the leader of a tough black prison gang, Rainwood is forced to learn a few lessons, mostly with the help of Virgil Cane (F. Murray Abraham), a wise and charming lifer who takes an interest in the new convict because he also had problems with the two dirty cops who framed Rainwood.

Practically overnight Rainwood is transformed from a handsome, meek, mind-his-own-business outsider to a pumped-up, cynical, no-more-Mr.-Nice-Guy hardened convict.

This is not a film to be confused with a classic like *The Wrong Man*, in which the master followed the true story of Manny Balestreros, a New York musician and family man jailed for armed robbery in a case of



WAREHOUSE SALE

Our warehouse is full—full of classic back issues of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* and *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. That's why we're having our first warehouse sale. For only \$9.95 plus postage and handling, we will send you an assortment of 10 classic issues of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* or *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. That's less than \$1.00 per issue, an unprecedented savings.

Please send your check or money order (no COD's please) to:

**Warehouse Sale
Davis Publications, Inc.
P.O. Box 40
Vernon, N.J. 07462**

Please send me

_____ An assortment of 10 issues of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* (\$9.95 plus \$3.50 postage and handling).

_____ An assortment of 10 issues of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* (\$9.95 plus \$3.50 postage and handling).

Please send to

Name _____
(Please Print)

Address _____

City _____ St _____ Zip _____

While we cannot accommodate requests for specific issues, we guarantee that you will be delighted with your surprise assortment and will enjoy discovering new stories and authors. Also, at this great price, these back issues will make wonderful gifts for your mystery-loving friends.

Available in U.S. only.

All 10 issues will be delivered to you within 6 to 8 weeks.

HCKC-8

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mistaken identity. *An Innocent Man* is an action picture in which revenge is the overriding motivation.

Jimmie Rainwood too easily accepts his conviction and prison term. Although his wife is said to be working for his freedom, there is little evidence to support it. She's briefly shown typing a letter to the judge on the case, and she meets with a police inspector (Badja Djola) who has his own doubts about the cops who put Rainwood away but doesn't do much about them. The campaign for his freedom appears almost nonexistent.

The whole case seems isolated from the real world. Why don't the Rainwoods have any friends or family to support them? Why can't they get a good lawyer? Why don't they go to the press?

These questions linger throughout the film, much like the numerous closeup shots of an introspective Tom Selleck, pondering his plight.

When, after three years, Rainwood is paroled, he and his wife hope to live their lives in normal obscurity. But the illusion of calm is quickly broken when our evil cops stop by for a visit for what they call "preventive maintainance," warning their wronged man to remain a "model citizen." These guys are not nice, so the prison-toughened Rainwood has to stop

them from ruining his life even further.

The film then shifts gears again into a complicated plot between Rainwood and an ex-con pal to entrap the bad guy cops into a dope deal while the suspicious police inspector looks on. While the first two-thirds of the movie is perhaps too simplistic, the final third is too mixed up, although filled with some good redblooded action.

Looked at as an action film, this Tom Selleck vehicle is good entertainment. But as a wronged-man film, it is hardly thought-provoking. There is little or no suspense, since we know early on that our hero is innocent and we know exactly how he was framed. When justice of sorts is finally achieved, it is only after a long and convoluted plot is played out.

One bright spot in *An Innocent Man* is the contrast between our hero's life before his problems began and after. When the film opens, with Selleck's character happily on the job, the score reaching a crescendo with a soothing saxophone, it captures the spirit of one of those TV commercials that sing, "It's morning in America," and everything is great. If everything is so great, the roof must be about to cave in. And it does.

But by the final credits does anybody still care about the Rainwood household?

THE STORY THAT WON



The October Mysterious Photo-Pool of Henderson, Texas. Honor-Belmont, California; Stefanie Ann Summers of Boston, Massachusetts; Karen Gierle Newman of Wichita, Kansas; Clarence Baird of Kenmore, New York; and Wanda Jones of Tulsa, Oklahoma.

graph contest was won by S. Lee able mentions go to Don Shaffer of toine of Germantown, Wisconsin; chusetts; Art Cosing of Fairfax, of West Babylon, New York; Louence Prince of Hamilton, Ontario,

© N. Jay Jaffe

BIG PLANS by S. Lee Pool

"Jack, look at that!"

"Yeah, looks like he's expecting us."

"Someone's tipped him off! He's even set us a place for dinner."

"Huh . . . as the main course more likely."

"Jack! Don't say things like that, I've got the heebie-jeebies as it is. What are we doing here anyhow?"

"To even an old score, honey."

"Are you kidding? We don't stand a chance against him. You barely got out with the golden goose and your skin still intact last time."

"Don't worry, I know what I'm doing. It's payback time for the jolly ole boy. Remember Goliath?"

"Yeah, so what?"

"Well, David's meeting us here this time."

"Good grief! Is that your big plan? What if it doesn't work? We'll be Rainbow Stew!"

A sly grin spread across Jack's face as he searched his pockets. Finally, he fished out a gleaming pair of silver shears. He placed an arm around her shoulders and held the scissors before her face. "If David fails, then he's all yours, Delilah. Just do your stuff."

CLASSIFIED

MARKET

AH-FEBRUARY/90

ALFRED HITCHCOCK—published 13 times a year. CLASSIFIED AD rate is \$2.60 per word—payable in advance—(\$39.00 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional.

ADDITIONAL INCOME

\$1000/Thousand Immediately Stuffing Envelopes. FREE Supplies. Rush Stamped, Addressed Envelope: Elda Enterprises, Division M2, 4 Fairview Lane, Palm Coast, Florida 32137.

TELEPHONE COMPANY pays big money by mail! Brochure - Application \$1.00. Dean, 664 Ocean Lakes Drive, Dept. 55, Virginia Beach, VA 23454.

AUTOMOBILES & MIDGET CARS

IS it true . . . Jeeps For \$44 Through The Government? Call For Facts! 1-312-742-1142 Ext. 4674.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperbacks, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

FREE CATALOG. Used hardback mystery, crime and detective books. Steve Powell, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, Maine 04609.

WORLD'S largest mystery stock. Search Service. Free catalogues. Limited Editions. Aardvarks, Box 585070, Orlando, FL 32858-5070.

MAKE YOUR CLASSIFIED AD PAY. Get "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth \$5.00 towards a classified ad in this publication. Send \$3.25 (includes postage) to Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

FREE LIST! Used Hardcover mystery and detective fiction. Dunn's Mysteries, Box 2544, Meriden, CT 06450.

MYSTERY FICTION. Free Catalogue. Write: Magna Mysteries, P.O. Box 5732, Virginia Beach, VA 23455.

FREE CATALOGUE of mysteries and thrillers. Write: Time and Again Books, 367 Main, North Andover, Mass. 01845.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

SEND 25¢ for Large Listing of Mystery and Detective Books. Canford, Drawer 216E, Freeville, NY 13068.

ANNOTATED lists of new mysteries. Also used mystery, catalog. Rue Morgue, 946 Pearl, Boulder, CO 80302.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing Mail! Free Supplies, Postage! Bonuses! Start immediately! Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-MDC, Burnt Hills, NY 12027-9983.

STAY HOME! MAKE MONEY ADDRESSING ENVELOPES. VALUABLE GENUINE OFFER. 20¢. Write Lindco, 3636-DA Peterson Ave., Chicago, IL 60659.

VENDING MACHINES. No Selling. Routes earn amazing profits. 32-page Catalogue FREE. Parkway Corporation, 1930N Greenspring Drive, Timonium, Maryland 21093.

BUMPERSTICKER PRINTER. Cheap, Simple, Portable. Free Details. Bumper, POB 22791(BC), Tampa, FL 33622.

PROFITABLE GOLD FOIL PRINTER. Personalize business cards, pencils, matches. Free details. Gold, P.O. Box 24986(BC), Tampa, FL 33623.

BIG PROFITS, SMALL INVESTMENT. Cash-in on the growing HOT demand for PERSONALIZED COFFEE MUGS for business & personal gifts. Our portable MUG MACHINE lets you put photos and artwork on high-profit ceramic mugs, quickly & easily. Call Ext. 440 at 800-334-0425 (in North Carolina, 800-331-4651).

READ BOOKS for pay! \$100 a title. Write: PASE-HE9, 161 Lincolnway, North Aurora, IL 60542.

MAKE \$15,000 IN 30 DAYS! EASY! NO INVESTMENT! FREE DETAILS: FINANCIAL, BOX 1150-DP, FORT WASHINGTON, PA 19034.

PLACE

CLASSIFIED

AH-FEBRUARY/90

To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

EARN Hundreds Weekly. Stuffing Envelopes. Proven Successful. No Experience Necessary. Start Immediately. New Era Enterprises, M., 1589 Albion, Rexdale, Ontario M9V 1B6. Enclose a long SASE.

SECRETS revealed! How to start/grow any business with ZERO cash. Information (stamp): Exchange-A20, 820 PCH #118, Hermosa, CA 90254.

VENDING ROUTES earn amazing profits! Snacks, games, all types! **BUY WHOLESALE DIRECT GUARANTEED!** 609-866-0440.

SELL Books By Mail! \$50.00 Yearly! Free 80 Page Get Started Manual! Quality, Box 1305-PJ, Seaford, NY 11783.

GET PAID for mailing letters! \$200.00 daily. Write: PAASE-SM5, 161 Lincolnway, North Aurora, IL 60542.

FREE DEALERSHIP—SELL MAILING LISTS! Complete Program Free! Write Today: PCW, Box 1302-IN129, Valley Stream, NY 11582.

HOME IMPORT MAIL ORDER BUSINESS: Start without capital. Free Report. Mellinger, Dept. A1731, Woodland Hills, California 91367.

BUY IT WHOLESALE

400,000 BARGAINS Below Wholesale! Many Free! Liquidations . . . Closeouts . . . Job Lots . . . Single Samples. Free Details. Worldwide Bargainhunters, Box 1409-IO, Holland MI 49424.

CLOSEOUTS! Discounts! Below wholesale! Liquidations! Freebies! All kinds! Information (Stamp): DDN, 20152-D, Ferndale, Michigan 48220.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, Newbern, NC 28560.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION—Cont'd

HIGH SCHOOL AT HOME, diploma awarded. Low tuition. Our 92nd year. Phone free anytime 1-800-228-5600, or write American School, Dept. #322, 850 E. 58th St., Chicago, IL 60637.

FINANCIAL

VISA/MASTERCARD. NO SAVINGS REQUIRED. Bad credit no problem. Limits to \$5,000.00. Personal and business loans. 1-904-221-7139 for application. 24 hours.

PERSONAL loans, credit cards by mail. Write: Financial, Box 145-D, Palmer, MA 01069 or call 413-283-6379.

FOR INVENTORS

INVENTORS! Can you patent and profit from your idea? Call **AMERICAN INVENTORS CORPORATION** for free information. Over a decade of service. 1-800-338-5656. In Canada call (413) 568-3753.

A NEW IDEA? Call National Idea Center of Washington, D.C. Free info—1-800-247-6600 ext. 126. Come see the Invention Store!

GIFTS THAT PLEASE

A gift sure to please—**ISAAC ASIMOV's SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE**, published monthly. Send \$19.50 for 13 issues (includes shipping & postage) to Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 7058 Red Oak, IA 51591.

JEWELRY

CLOSEOUT JEWELRY. 55¢ Dozen. 25¢ gets catalog. **ROUSSELS**, 107-910 Dow, Arlington, MA 02174-7199.

LOTTERIES & SWEEPSTAKES

"**BIG-Money Sweepstakes**" - How to enter and win! . . . \$1 + Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope. CP Company, 11 Rushmore Ct., Sumter, SC 29154.

Classified Continued

AH-FEBRUARY/90

MAILING LISTS

NEW NAMES! Only sold once! Computerized labels! Guaranteed deliverable! DCO: 1-800-992-9405 Visa/MC/AmEx.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

READ "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how. Also includes certificate worth \$5.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy, send \$3.25 (postage included) to **DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC.**, Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing mail! Free Supplies, Postage! Bonuses! Start immediately! Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCM, Burnt Hills, NY 12027-9983.

HUGE PROFITS! Learn VCR Cleaning and Repair. Award-winning Video and Training Manual reveals **SECRETS!** Prior Experience Unnecessary. Free info: Viejo Publications, 3540 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 310, Dept. IO2, L.A., CA 90010.

\$300 A DAY! Process Phone Orders. People Call You. Rush Stamped Envelope. CBB, Box 1109, Hazlehurst, GA 31539.

GET THE MONEY YOU NEED NOW! Golden Book of little known sources. \$12.00 to: Vern Associates, P.O. Box 621504, Littleton, CO 80162.

HOME ASSEMBLY! NUMEROUS PRODUCTS! RECORDED MESSAGE! CALL 24 hrs. (REFUNDABLE)! 1-900-369-INFO, EXT. 43.

SUCCESS, MONEY, POWER. Have it all. FREE brochure reveals secrets. Postage/handling \$1.00: **JAN'S Mailorder**, 1200 New York, Dept. IO, Brooklyn, NY 11203.

HOMEWORKERS Needed! \$50.00-\$500.00 Weekly! Starter Kit \$1.00: Unicorn, Box 48366-IO, Cumberland, NC 28331.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

SUPER MONEY-MAKING MLM OPPORTUNITY. ABSOLUTELY FLAWLESS. STEADY INCOME. NO INVENTORY. SAHARA, Inc., Suite 1105, 82 WALL STREET, NY 10005.

LITTLE MONEY NEEDED to make big bucks. Start your own successful home businesses. **FREE DETAILS.** Evergreen Publishing, 1680 Rees Hill Rd., Salem, OR 97306.

OUTSTANDING HOME MAILING PROGRAM! EXCEPTIONAL EARNINGS! FREE DETAILS: PREMIER MAILERS-18, BOX 26800-300, ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87125.

START Highly Profitable Envelope Stuffing Business At Home. Send \$1.00 To: Infosys-D, 3414 18th Avenue, Vernon, BC Canada V1T 1E3.

SELL BEAUTIFUL HANDCRAFTED EARRINGS. 12 Sample Pairs \$10. Satisfaction 100% Guaranteed! Flutterby's, Box 540W, Alexandria Bay, NY 13607.

FREE Moneymaking Mail Order Dealerships. Plus **FREE** Postage Plan. CASTLE, Box 234C, Pawling, NY 12564.

MAILORDER SUCCESS AWAITS YOU!! Learn ALL the facts and secrets needed to start profitable home business. No experience or capital. Information **FREE.** Berkshire House, 29 Holmes Road, Pittsfield, MA 01201.

FAIR INCOME, SPARE TIME selling hardware stores brand name product. Free cassette, color catalog 1-800-556-6538.

HUGE PROFITS! Making Simple Homemade Booklets! Marketing's Easy! Details: Geyser, Box 35622, Richmond, Virginia 23235.

MURDER MYSTERY WEEKENDS

YOU will take an active part in solving a **MURDER** at specially selected resorts! Call now, Toll-Free: 800-K-I-L-L-E-R-S.

**YOU'LL MAKE
MONEY**

**SAVE MONEY TOO—
BY READING and ANSWERING
THESE CLASSIFIED ADS**

Classified Continued

AH-FEBRUARY/90

OF INTEREST TO ALL

WHAT HAPPENED On Your Birthdate? Headlines, News, Sports, Pop Music. Laminated To Last. \$3.00. Joe White, 3435 So. Orange, 104T, Orlando 32806.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people. 18-80. Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE. American — Mexican — Philippine—European. Photo selection FREE! Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista, CA 92012.

ORIENTAL ladies seeking correspondence, marriage. Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948.

BEAUTIFUL, ENGLISH SPEAKING, FILIPINAS want men of all ages as Life-partners. VIDEOS AVAILABLE. PAL, 51 BLANCA, CO 81123-0084.

NATIONWIDE Singles Magazine. Send Name, Address, Age. Send No Money. Exchange, 1817 Welton #1580, Denver, Colorado 80202.

BEAUTIFUL ASIAN LADIES seek life mates. FREE Videos, Photos. Devotion, Box 549-DP, Dublin, VA 24084-0549. (703) 674-GIRL.

DISCOVER your true personality through Handwriting! Send Sase: Van Deursen, 6432 Juniper Rd., Port Richey, FL 34668.

PERSONAL—Cont'd

NICE SINGLES with Christian values. In Your Area. Nationwide. Free Magazine: Dept. 10, P.O. Box 454, Crossville, Tennessee 38557.

SALESMEN-DISTRIBUTORS

AD SPECIALTY SALES OPENINGS. 80 Years in the Advertising Specialty and Calendar Industry have taught us the best Salespeople are Self-Starters who prefer the independence of straight commission sales over someone else calling the shots. NEWTON MFG. CO. offers that person the BEST Home Office Support in the industry! Ask around! Weekly Commissions, 24 Hour Toll-Free Message Center, a Generous Cash Bonus and the Top Sample Program in the Business. All orders acknowledged. Shipping Notices provided and MUCH MORE! No Investment, No Collections. Full or Part-Time. You're your own Boss. Contact Kevin Peska, NEWTON MFG. CO., Dept. HI0C1, Newton, Iowa 50208.

SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

TAPES & CASSETTES

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, Pennsylvania 17349.

For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:

Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.

For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager,
Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

▼ OUR EXCLUSIVE MAIL-ORDER INTRODUCTION



It's a toss-up as to whether it's kids or parents who are happiest with this very special Child's Chair. From the tyke's point of view, it's great because it pulls right up to a real table (fits under standard dining tables of 27¼" or higher). Children can feel part of family meals when not relegated to a highchair, plus a table is better than that little tray for food plus the requisite toys. Older toddlers are particularly pleased with what resembles a "grown-up" chair. Adults love the quality — American-made of solid ¾" oak, double-lacquered for protection, plus the safety features — all edges rounded, all screws recessed, polypropylene straps attached with screws and washers. Designed for durability (nylon gliders instead of casters that fall off; no upholstery to replace), it's been extensively tested in restaurants, where there's more abuse than even *your* kids can dish out. Since there's nothing like a highchair for spoiling your decor the very best feature may be the handsome styling. 18"x20" at base. **\$85.98** (\$10.00) #A1792.

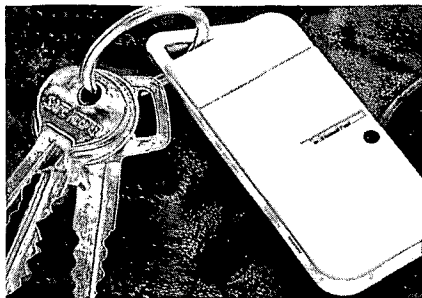


▼ YOUR FACE WILL THINK YOU'VE BEEN TO A LUXURY SPA

Some of the world's most famous professional salons rely on the deep-cleaning and rejuvenating effects of facial steaming. Accomplishing it at home has meant leaning over a stove under a towel tent — and who can be bothered? Now, there's the Episauna — just fill with tap water, plug in, flip up the hood to a comfortable angle and enjoy the warm, soothing mist. Tense facial muscles relax, nature's own perspiration system is stimulated to open and clean pores; built-up cosmetics and grime disappear. Use with your favorite cream and see its effects multiplied — dry, even over-sunned or chapped skin — can benefit. With hood flipped down, Episauna is just 3½" tall, for easy storing or packing. Even adjusts for foreign voltages automatically. UL listed, doubles as a vaporizer/inhaler for nasal congestion. **\$39.98** (\$4.00) #A1862.

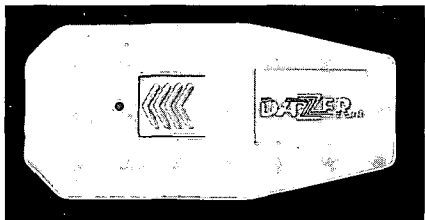


▼ EASY KEY FINDER



Keyes are misplaced more often than any other modern essential. Now thanks to our easy key finder your keys can tell you where you put them. Clap your hands 4 times and it will chirp electronically. Works up to 30' away. Special hybrid microchip design requires no on/off switch (other units need you to turn them ON before you lose your keys). This unit has a high-impact plastic case; weighs a mere 1/2oz; comes with its own key ring; measures only 2 1/2"x1 1/8"x3/8". Batteries and a 30-day manufacturer's warranty are included. **\$13.98** (\$3.00) #A1889; two units, **\$23.98** (\$4.00) #A1890.

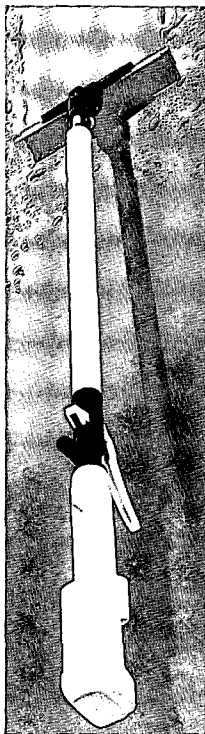
▼ HELPFUL TO HUMANS HARMLESS TO DOGS



Even the most dedicated canine aficionado can sometimes encounter unfriendly dogs. Dazer™ provides a humane way to repel their advance, emitting ultrasonic sound waves inaudible to humans and totally safe for dogs (unlike mace and other common deterrents). Pocket size (4 3/4" long) plastic case can also clip on belt; takes 1-9V battery, included. For joggers, hikers, bikers, seniors and kids—plus the proverbial postman. **\$29.98**, (\$3.00) #A1829X.

▼ YES, IT DOES WINDOWS — IN HALF THE TIME

Do we exaggerate? Actually, it may take less than half the time you'd normally spend assembling, toting and juggling bottles or buckets, rags, a hose, a stepstool. Spray & Wipe™ combines in one implement an ample reservoir for your cleaning fluid, a spray trigger at the base and adjustable mist-to-spray head at top, plus a squeegee. At 34" long, it eliminates much climbing; is lightweight but sturdy for firm leverage on the squeegee; swivel head reaches angles. Think patio doors, shower stalls, boats, campers, windshields, et al. **\$15.98** (\$4.00) #A1865X.



HOW TO ORDER

CALL TOLL FREE, 24 HOURS A DAY,
7 DAYS A WEEK

1-800-365-8493

CUSTOMER SERVICE CALL 201-367-2900

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

**30 Day Money Back Guarantee For
Exchange or Refund**

WE ACCEPT MASTERCARD/VISA

If ordering by mail send remittance to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept. 020 HK; P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701. Item price is followed by shipping and handling in (). Be sure to add both together to arrive at total price. N.J. residents add 6% sales tax. When using credit card — include account number, exp date, signature. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign or C.O.D. orders.

Magalog Marketing Group Inc. © 1989

1905 Swarthmore Ave., Lakewood, N.J. 08701

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

▼ YOGURT CHEESE FUNNEL & RECIPE BOOK



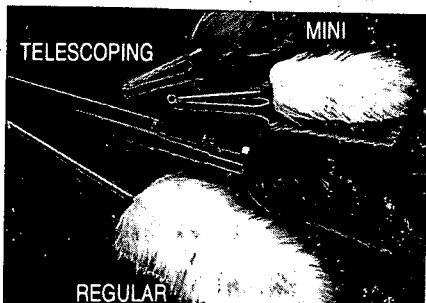
In less than a minute, you can make the newest, healthiest most economical spread — just spoon plain yogurt into this woven plastic funnel, place in the frig,

in 8-14 hrs. you have really creamy cheese. Using 1½% milkfat yogurt, it has 90% less fat, ⅔ calories but over twice the calcium of commercial cream cheese. Yet most people including avowed yogurt haters can't tell the difference! Use the 142 page recipe book included or substitute for cream cheese, mayonnaise, or sour cream in your favorite recipes. Funnel holds up to 16oz. Makes about 8oz. of yogurt cheese. Our set provides 142-page recipe book, 1 funnel, you'll have enough for the lemon cheesecake shown above — scrumptious and a mere 125 calories.

\$26.98 (\$5.00)
#A1892

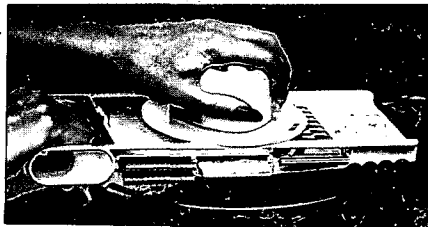


▼ DUST MAGNETS



Lambswool contains a natural static charge that makes dust literally leap off surfaces. Our dusters are imported from England. They are the fluffiest, highest quality lambswool in the world! We offer a set of four lambswool dusters: our 27" duster, our telescoping duster which extends to more than four feet — lets you reach high corners, top shelves, overhead lights and collapses to 28", and two mini dusters for extra fragile objects. **\$22.98** (\$4.00) #A1870.

▼ GOOD NATURED GRATER



The Leifheit 4-in-1 grater is a sure-grip food holder that lets you work at top speed with no fear of flaying your fingers. Molded hand-grip gives sure control, indentations seat the grater securely atop bowls from 4½" to 9½" diameter. Blades are stainless steel, store right in grater frame, and provide choice of small and large shredders, medium grater, and ground-edge slicer. The unit itself is made of tough ABS plastic, dishwasher safe. Imported from West Germany. It's the first truly civilized grater we've seen. **\$22.98** (\$4.25) #A1910.

HOW TO ORDER

CALL TOLL FREE, 24 HOURS A DAY,
7 DAYS A WEEK

1-800-365-8493

CUSTOMER SERVICE CALL 201-367-2900

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

**30 Day Money Back Guarantee For
Exchange or Refund**

WE ACCEPT MASTERCARD/VISA

If ordering by mail send remittance to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept. 020 HK, P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701. Item price is followed by shipping and handling in (). Be sure to add both together to arrive at total price. N.J. residents add 6% sales tax. When using credit card — include account number, exp. date, signature. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign or C.O.D. orders.

Magalog Marketing Group Inc. © 1989

1905 Swarthmore Ave., Lakewood, N.J. 08701